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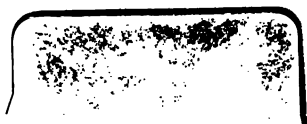
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OUR VISITORS





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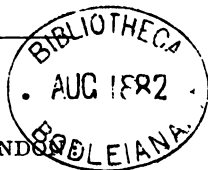


OUR VISITORS
AND
HOW TO AMUSE THEM.

BY
FRED. DAVIS

" Here you'll be ever sure to meet
A hearty welcome though no treat,
One who has nothing else to do,
But to divert himself and you."

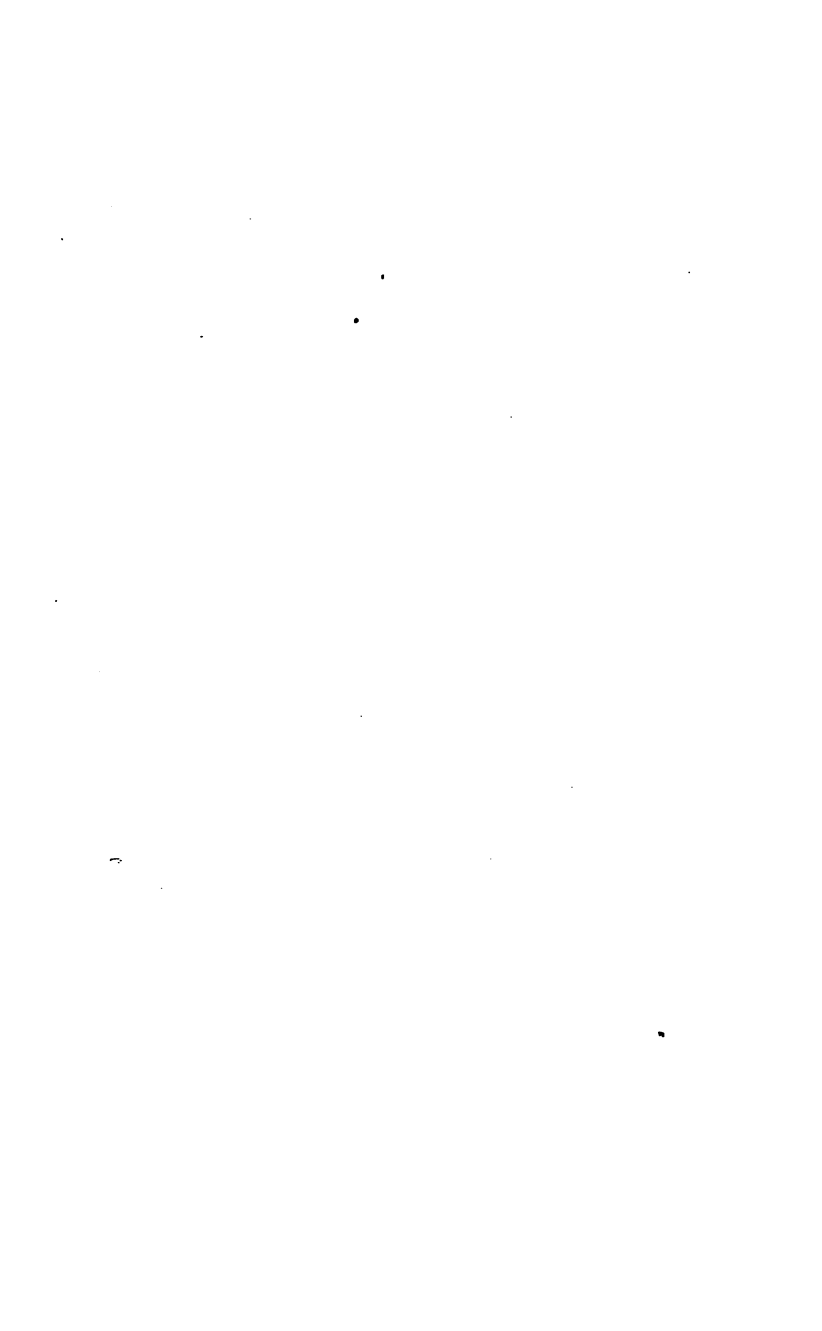
Soanie Jenyns.



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I.

TO THE READER.



DINGLE, dingle, dingle.

"Who's that I wonder? Oh! the Joneses. Bother, how I wish they had selected another evening for their visit. I wanted particularly to look into that new book, and now suppose I shan't get a chance!"

Dear Reader, have you never made an observation like this when some unexpected visitor arrived and upset the plan for your evening's recreation?

I am afraid you will feel constrained to admit the fact. Yet why do so many of us feel annoyed when visitors are announced? Why do we think them bores, and wish they had staid away? It is because we have not acquired the knack of mutual entertainment—that beautiful art of discovering and drawing out what is good in them, and of making a reciprocal offering. An art inborn in some people, but which all can acquire by "setting their minds" to the task.

Think how horrible life would be if deprived of its friendships. As Sydney Smith says very beautifully, "Life is fortified by many friendships. To love, and to be loved, is the greatest happiness of existence. If I lived under the burning sun of the equator, it would be a pleasure to me to think that there were many human beings on the other side of the world who regarded and respected me; I could and would not live if I were alone upon the earth, and cut off from the remembrance of my fellow creatures. It is not that a man has occasion often to fall back upon the kindness of his friends; perhaps he may never experience the necessity of doing so; but we are governed by our imaginations, and they stand there as a solid and impregnable bulwark against all the evils of life."

Then, again, you cannot but remember some very pleasant evenings you have spent at friends' houses—evenings when the time flew away unheeded, when the mind was delighted, when the wit was stimulated, when the whole soul was roused—occasions which will never be forgotten, and which stand out clear and shining in the memory like bright particular stars in the firmament above. Can you, then, deny to your friends the same happiness? Can you not feel that by a small expenditure of time and trouble you may do them a great pleasure, and give them subjects for like happy memories?

In order to be social you may have to give up several indulgences, and deny yourself some pleasures; but think how large a return you obtain for these outlays, and how much real satisfaction you will obtain—how much information you will gather, how much better and nobler a being you will be for the process. One of the chief causes of our advancement as a nation springs from the increase of our intercommunication, bringing together, as it does, supply and demand—old failings and new means of overcoming them; so in the same way our progress individually may spring from finding in other people's minds the knowledge which is lacking in our own, from avoiding the pitfalls into which they may have been betrayed, and by learning from their bright examples how to achieve success ourselves.

To point out some of the fallacies and quicksands of visiting, and to suggest a few methods of correcting and avoiding them, are the objects of this work, in which everyone, I hope, will find some means of rendering the visits of their friends not only pleasant, but valuable.





II.

HOSPITALITY: ITS PLEASURES AND DUTIES.

" Fill every beaker up, my men,
Pour forth the cheering wine ;
There's life and strength in every drop,
Thanksgiving to the vine."

A. G. Greene.



MAN is a gregarious animal. He likes to meet and have a gossip. No matter whether on the weather, business, politics, science, or art, everybody has something to say and something to hear. Was it not Coleridge who said of a man who scarcely ever spoke, "He thinks just as little?" Our boasted power of speech would be useless if we could never get any listeners. We like to compare notes with sympathetic friends ; "the soldier likes to shoulder his crutch and show how fields were won ;" the chemist likes to tell of the new substance he has won from the refuse of other's labours ; the painter likes to describe the triumphs of æsthetic art, and the new opinions of colour. There is a story told of a young gentleman who remarked to an aged friend that he was leaving college as he "had finished his education," whereupon his friend said that he was surprised to hear it, for he "was only just commencing his." We have always something to learn, and very often, like the pearl-seeker, in the most unlikely spot we shall find the most beautiful gem.

But though everyone will admit in the abstract that hospitality is a charming thing in its way, yet people differ greatly as to the mode in which it should find expression at their hands. Who has not, at some time or other, for instance, been present at a dinner party where nearly all the guests were strangers to each other ; where everything was of the newest and most unfamiliar descrip-

tion—even the viands seeming to partake of the general and all-pervading stiffness; where even the most desperate attempts at fun only produce a faint smile; and where, in fine, everybody was perfectly miserable for the space of three hours. The hostess's intention was to charm her guests with her hospitality, yet for want of "something" no one enjoyed himself a bit; and it is surprising to notice how many people there are whose only notion of showing hospitality is to give costly and elaborate dinner parties, or equally expensive and far more troublesome balls. They seem to have no idea of little friendly gatherings, where, without any great outlay for food or entertainment, every guest may come and spend an hour or two in a pleasant rational manner, and return home at a reasonable hour, without any apprehensions of the headache or indigestion to follow.

I have not the least doubt that such of my readers can call to mind many little reunions of this character, which were got up "on the spur of the moment" to meet some friend who was going away, or for some other sudden purpose, and for which there was no preparation whatever. Yet how pleasantly the evening passed away! What unstudied jokes did valiant duty! How everybody seemed to be on the most friendly and social terms with everybody else! And how each remarked on saying good bye, "How much more enjoyable was a little party got up at a moment's notice than the majority of larger and more splendid entertainments."

I would not for the world say a word against the old-fashioned and still correct dinner party, since there are some persons who are obliged to adopt this mode of receiving their friends. But to the young housekeeper possessed of only moderate means I would say that for the cost of one dinner they might have five or six social gatherings of a less pretentious character—might assemble a small party of friends, feed and amuse them in a simple and homely manner, and all without any alarming bills from the pastrycooks or wine merchants. Everybody who possesses fair health and a comfortable home ought to feel it a privilege to see their friends, and by the exercise of a little tact and management I feel sure that every one may do so with pleasure to their friends and satisfaction to themselves.



III.

SELECTION OF VISITORS.

"Welcome, my old friend,
Welcome to a foreign fire-side,
While the sullen gales of autumn
Shake the windows."

Longfellow.

ONE of the greatest means towards the promotion of friendly parties of a homely character lies in the selection of suitable friends—particularly to newly married people who are just starting on their household existence, and with the advantage of making a new circle of visitors. Of course it is not always easy to get visitors entirely to our mind, and if we are too particular and exacting, we run the risk of having no visitors at all. As Mistress Mogg says :—

"My friends were such a vulgar set,
Poor Tomkinson was snubb'd and huff'd,
She could not bear that Mister Blogg——"

A little observation of people, and a little caution in making new friends, will generally enable us to add one by one to our list, until we have as many as we care for—for a few true friends are infinitely better than a large number who are little better than acquaintances. Most people will recall to mind the case of the *friend* of the forger Fauntleroy, who sought a last interview with the ex-banker simply to ask him where he had obtained some particular kind of wine whose origin he had always refused to divulge !

One of the great reasons for care in the selection of our visitors is, that everyone with whom we associate exer-

cises some influence over us—no matter how strong our character may be—there is no one so invulnerable that nothing will touch him, even Achilles' heel was found out by an arrow at last. We are influenced often by people who are apparently below us in intellectual attainments, or force of character, so that if we select good, amiable, religious friends, we shall avoid at least one danger—that of learning from bad examples.

Lord Shelburne (afterwards Marquis of Lansdowne), when a young man, paid a visit to the venerable Malesherbes, and was so much impressed by it that he said, "I have travelled much, but I have never been so influenced by personal contact with any man; and if I ever accomplish any good in the course of my life, I am certain that the recollection of M. de Malesherbes will animate my soul." And Mr. French says of the late John Sterling, "It was impossible to come in contact with his noble nature without feeling one's self in some measure *ennobled* and lifted up."

There are, of course, many visitors who have special claims upon us, and whom we are in duty bound to entertain, whether they be intellectual or stupid. There are relatives and aged friends, and persons to whom we are indebted for taking care of us when young—the helpless, the indigent, the sorrow stricken; but these do not come within the limit of selected visitors—they form a more sacred category.

The friends we should select should, if possible, be those who are distinguished for those virtues and qualities which we most ardently wish to acquire; and if we cast our eyes around in a liberal spirit, we shall soon discover that there are plenty of agreeable people still left in the world—people who are intelligent, true hearted, and well disposed, and whose friendship will prove an everlasting source of pleasure and benefit to us.





IV.

THE HOSTESS.

"Yet she was not profuse, but feared to waste,
And wisely managed, that the stock might last ;
That all might be supplied and she not grieve,
When crowds appeared, and she had not to relieve."

Dryden.

HOW much, at an entertainment, depends upon the hostess ! She is the life and soul of the party. Everything devolves upon her. And if the thing is successful, it will be so mostly from her tact and good management. She has a large responsibility, and much to see to. All the anxiety, and but little of the enjoyment, except that which springs from the consciousness of duty well done and guests made happy. But every day one sees that it is not given naturally to every woman to shine as a good hostess, and there is a great deal more required to constitute one than merely providing the necessary food and amusement, and saying "How do you do?" Some ladies apparently seem to fit the post, and go through their duties by instinct, and without study or constraint. The celebrated Lady Blessington was very clever in this way. She was able to invite persons of diametrically opposite views and opinions — Protestant and Roman Catholic, Whig and Tory, artist and critic, and then in her captivating and genial manner manage to find some common ground for them to meet on, and so render them perfectly at home together.

Lady Holland had a similar social gift, and how often we read in contemporary writers (Sydney Smith, Macaulay, and others) of the charming gatherings at Holland House, where the poet, the statesman, the painter, and the lawyer all found something mutually interesting, and each came away feeling a better and a nobler man. These celebrated persons were born hostesses, and in their way un-

approachable, yet less gifted ladies may, by a little observation and careful study, fill the part with grace and efficiency, and diffuse a charm upon all who have the privilege of their acquaintance. As Sydney Smith says very beautifully—

“A woman of accomplishments may entertain those who have the pleasure of knowing her for half-an-hour with great brilliancy ; but a mind full of ideas, and with that elastic spring which the love of knowledge only can convey, is a perpetual source of exhilaration and amusement to all who come within reach ; not collecting its force into single and insulated achievements, like the efforts made in the fine arts, but diffusing, equally over the whole of existence, a calm pleasure—better loved as it is longer felt—and suitable to every variety and every period of life.”

As the hostess is the head and chief point of interest, every one looks to her for precedent, and usually tries to copy, or at least to make their actions and demeanour correspond with hers ; and so it happens that when the hostess leads off with a cheerful and hearty welcome, and with a good-natured loquacity—when she has a smile for one, a little innocent banter for another, and a pleasant manner for all, her guests soon feel at their ease, and every one is happy. A great point with a hostess is to be very self-possessed in the midst of all her gaiety—in the depth of all her conversation she must never lose her head, she is the general of the engagement, the mistress of the situation, and every one owes her allegiance.

“Beyond the common witchery that dwells in woman’s eye ;

With reverence deep, like any slave of that peculiar land,

I bow’d my forehead to the earth, and kiss’d the arid sand ;

And then I touch’d her garment’s hem, devoutly as a Dervise,

Predestinated (so I felt) for ever to her service.”

The hostess has unbounded power, and she needs therefore great discretion in employing it. If every guest were a personal friend, and thoroughly known to every one else, and perfectly *au fait* at these entertainments, her duties would be comparatively light ; but at parties the case is

seldom so, and a sagacious hostess will always find plenty of opportunity for the display of all her tact and good management.

The hostess must be careful not to overtax her strength, especially if she is not very robust. I remember being at a dance where the hostess (a most agreeable and popular lady) accepted so many engagements to dance that before the evening was half over she was tired out, and obliged to retire to rest. This of course might have been avoided by a little discretion. The hostess must remember, particularly at a dance, that she has a long evening before her, and that she has already exerted herself a great deal with all the preparations; that there are plenty of *guests* to dance; and that as every gentleman *ought* to ask her to dance, if she acceded to each request she would do nothing but dance all the evening. I do not wish to prohibit the hostess taking a part in the agreeable exercise, but she ought certainly rather to take care that her guests enjoy themselves in that way than do so herself.

The hostess must be brief and general in her attentions; however great the attraction of some of her guests, she should always remember that she has other friends present, and that she owes it to all that each should receive a share, however limited it may be, of her attentions, and no one will accuse her of abruptness in leaving them under such circumstances. There are at every party certain guests who seem to be always unfortunate, and for some unexplained reason seem never to make any acquaintances, know nobody, and if unassisted will sit nearly all the evening in one spot. They are, of course, very nice people, else they would not have been invited; but they are helpless, and it is for the hostess to come to their assistance by introducing them to other friends, by inviting them to partake of refreshments, or directing them to some objects of amusement. She is scarcely a perfect hostess who allows many "*wallflowers*." Some hostesses are in the habit of speaking under their breath, *i.e.*, they sink their voice so low in talking to any one that strangers imagine that something confidential is being communicated, and try not to listen; whereas, perhaps, the hostess is only observing in that mysterious and unfortunate manner that the weather is very wretched or beautiful, as the case may be. The hostess at an

entertainment should talk only on subjects common to everyone, and must avoid all appearance even of discussing things strictly confidential, for such topics, at such a time, are entirely out of place ; the guests meet for mutual enjoyment, and all consent to banish anything of the nature of business, as it is said they "leave the shop at home." The hostess, too, will have to initiate the various subjects, or at least must have something to say about the current topics of the day, and she will do well to get up a store of ready knowledge of that kind, so as to be able to start a subject of conversation, and have some opinion upon it, however slight. In this way literary ladies and amateurs in any of the sciences or arts, provided they be tolerably earnest in their pursuit of knowledge, possess a great advantage, because they can bring forth the riches of the kingdom they live in, and delight every one, whether it be by painting, sculpture, literature, chemistry, botany, or anything else. There are some clever hostesses of whom we might say—

"Yes, indeed, she's a charming woman,
And she reads both Latin and Greek ;
And I'm told that she solved a problem
In Euclid before she could speak."

But even supposing that the hostess has no speciality, she must be very weak who cannot, from the current periodicals, pick up sufficient small talk to keep the ball of conversation rolling, and be the principal means of drawing out a lot of knowledge from other people. It will also be advisable for the hostess not to dress so brilliantly as to eclipse her guests' toilets, her object being to charm them with her affability and good-nature, and not to overawe them with a splendid dress or magnificent display of jewellery. A hostess will do well rather to underdress than to fall into the other extreme—to act as a kind of foil to set off the costumes of her friends. Moreover, she will need personally to see to some of the domestic details if she wishes to have everything go off successfully, for however well served she may be, she will often find out the truth of the maxim, "If you want a thing done well, do it yourself." In cases of large assemblies, it will be well for the hostess to remain somewhere near the door of entrance, so as to be ready to *receive her guests immediately they enter the room* ; and

the same place is good at leaving, so that the leave-taking may be conducted as quietly as possible. Nothing is so likely to break up a social gathering prematurely as a lot of guests rushing about with their bonnets and wrappers on, trying to find the hostess to wish her good bye. The hostess has, in fact, a very arduous task, and one which demands a large amount of energy and self-denial, but at the same time she is one of the powers that be. She has great privileges, and there is perhaps nothing in social life so beautiful and interesting as a clever and successful hostess. Mrs. Schimmel Penninck, in her old age, was accustomed to call to mind the influence exercised by her mother upon the society amidst which she moved. When she entered the room, it had the effect of immediately raising the tone of the conversation, and as if purifying the moral atmosphere, all seeming to breathe more freely, and stand more erectly. "In her presence," says the daughter, "I became for the first time transformed into another person."





V.

ACCOMMODATION FOR VISITORS, ETC.

"The night was dark, and drear the heath,
And sullen howled the wind,
When o'er the world a pilgrim stray'd
Some friendly inn to find."

Anon.

MUCH of the enjoyment of the guests depends upon the little provisions for the incidental wants of human nature. The savages and aborigines have "manners none and customs nasty;" but civilization, in improving upon primitive notions, demands that man's natural wants shall be considered and provided for in a sensible and convenient manner. Gentlemen's coats and hats, and ladies' wraps all need to be accommodated somewhere. Ladies are generally shown up into the bedrooms, where they should find ample provision for everything: gentlemen attending in evening dress, come, as the French people say, *à quatre epingles*, and only require to leave their hats and coats; but at the quiet and more homely social gatherings, "tea fights," etc., many of them come straight from business, from dust and smoke, and honest sweat, and the first thing they generally need is a room to deposit their *impedimenta*, and some sensible provision for performing their ablutions. I think I may safely say that not one house in a dozen is satisfactorily furnished in this respect. People admit in the abstract that something of the kind should be arranged, but none set about arranging it. The mode of supplying this want is to find out, by diligent examination, some small place of suitable dimensions, say at least three yards by two wide, either by routing out some of the lumber, partitioning off part of the landing, or cribbing some portion of one of the least needed rooms; then fix a washstand, with water supply

from cistern, and waste to drain ; or, if means will not admit of this, then let an ordinary wash-handstand, ewer, etc., be placed in the lavatory, with towels, looking-glass, brushes, etc., etc., so that each guest may be able to have a comfortable wash, brush-up, etc. I feel quite sure that every one can find some means of providing this *absolutely necessary* and most agreeable adjunct, and no house can be considered complete without one. It is desirable on the party night that some one should be specially appointed to look after it (particularly if on the washstand principle), to keep everything in working order, supply clean towels, etc., so that no one shall, on entering, have to complain with the little bear in the nursery fable, "Who's been washing in my stand, and used all the water up."

Gentlemen, particularly in winter time, usually have a thick overcoat, as well as hat, and probably an umbrella or walking-stick. What is to be done with them? They must be put *somewhere*, and so put that when the party breaks up every one may speedily find his apparel. I have seen a fearful *tableau* where no organised arrangement existed. A group of angry people turning over a pile of coats of every description, or upsetting a *column* of hats in the hope of finding their own ; while their *cara sposa* or *chère amie* was waiting disconsolately in the hall for them. Always, therefore, provide a lot of hooks, fastened in a wall or partition, on which coats, etc., may be hung ; or, if preferred, some shelves may be fitted up, on which coats, hats, etc., may be laid. And here the great thing is to keep everything in groups, the hat with the coat, so that they may be together when wanted. And when a large number of people are expected, it is very convenient to have some simple system of tickets. These may be written and numbered for easy reference, and will save a deal of delay, particularly in a narrow passage or small room.

And here I would suggest to those who go to parties, conversaziones, etc., that opera hats, soft felt hats, or the so-called bowler hats are much better than the ordinary black silk hat. I mention this because I have seen at conversaziones gentlemen in evening dress, walking about with a roughened "chimney-pot" in their hand, much to their own chagrin and other people's discomfort. Or they may have, as head gear, some kind of cap, which

will go into their coat pocket. By this means they avoid a dissolution of partnership between Messrs. Coat, Hat & Co. at the moment of departure.

Another suggestion, particularly to gentlemen going to suburban parties, is to take a pair of ordinary walking boots (in a bag if necessary), for it not unfrequently happens, when the party is a late one, that not a cab is to be had for love or money, and the guests who do not happen to have carriages are compelled to stay till the morning, or to walk away on foot, in which case their patent leathers are about the most uncomfortable foot gear possible for rough country roads, and a pair of ordinary walking boots becomes at such a time a perfect treasure to their wearers.





VI.

THE INVITATION CARD.

"She had sent through all the village
Messengers with wands of willow
As a sign of invitation."

Longfellow.



HERE are as many different forms or modes of inviting guests as there are shades of colour or tints of light, varying from the Mrs. ——— at home ———, to the friendly and social letter ; and there are stout defenders of each description of missive, and as long as the "maning" is as plain as that of "Katie's letter," it matters little which one is selected, the latter form appearing, however, to express more warmth of welcome than the former. Where a regular ball is intended and stated everybody, of course, is quite *au fait* ; but in entertainments of a humbler kind, many, if not most, invitations fail in one point—that of indicating *clearly* what kind of entertainment is to be provided. The theory, no doubt, is "shut your eyes and open your mouth," etc., or, in other words, if you will come on such a day at such a time you may rest assured that you will be well entertained in some way. And when the guests do go they find plenty to entertain and feed them ; but notwithstanding these provisos, I have seen people made most uncomfortable from having come attired in a style different from that of the other guests, either by being in evening dress when the others wore morning clothes, or *vice versa*.

Few people like to appear singular in the matter of dress, either by dressing above the level or below it. The difficulty often arises from a want of thought on the part of *the hostess*, or from a want of decision ; she cannot exactly

define the status of the party, and so she leaves the guests to come as they think proper, trusting to their good sense to help them through ; but this is a very weak course to pursue, and at such a time some information ought to be vouchsafed. The hostess should make up her mind what character she desires to impress upon her party, and then state in the invitation either "walking dress" or "half-dress"—that is, gentlemen to wear evening dress, with dark gloves, and ladies come in morning dress, or perhaps in a square cut dress and light gloves, or whatever other costume she desires. It is an act of courtesy, and will be appreciated as such by all the guests. Another subject for attention is the music. Sometimes the hostess intends to make the evening a musical one (and a capital one too), yet on such occasions how often it happens that those who can and would most willingly sing or play have not brought their music from not knowing that it will be desired. Again, how provoking it is to get up a new song or piece, and take the trouble to bring a roll of music, and then to find that it is not required. Surely it would be very easy to determine before inviting the guests whether music is to be introduced, and then to specify the same on the card of invitation by asking the visitor to bring a song or piece ; the guests would then come provided and be under no difficulty.

Apropos of this, a story is related of a celebrated musician (I believe Paganini), whom a lady had casually met at an evening party. Thinking to make him the lion of the party she was about to give, rather than from any other reason, she sent him an invitation. The virtuoso saw through the matter at a glance, and duly presented himself at the appointed hour, *minus his instrument* at the entertainment. When the evening was well advanced the lady bethought herself of her lion, and politely requested a solo, to which the musician, bowing most gracefully, replied "that he was very sorry, but he hadn't brought his instrument, as he concluded that the invitation was a personal one, and not intended for his violin."

It is also very desirable, in inviting a comparative stranger, or one who, although well-known, has not yet been to the hostess's house, and also in the case of a change of address, to give some information of the neighbourhood of the house, for it is quite a common thing to see people driving up and down a new suburb, searching

in vain for some house which they know only by name, and certainly at the mercy of the merry wag who—

“gave a nod, and then a wink,
And told me to get there ;
Straight down the crooked lane,
And all round the square.”

In such cases a few explicit directions will be most valuable, and will save lots of annoyance and heaps of trouble.

In inviting *comparative* strangers, it is a good plan to mention with the invitation that they will meet Mr. and Mrs. So and So (mutual friends), because some persons are rather diffident amongst strangers, and would keep away if they thought they would know no one. If you tell them, therefore, that they will meet some of their intimates, you go a long way towards securing them.

Another hint is to have the invitation printed, if possible, on a thin card of small size (of course of best quality and workmanship), and to have the address in plain readable type, unless indeed—

“you may choose
To indulge in some little extempore views,
Like the older artistical people ;
For example, a Corydon playing his pipe,
In a low country marsh, with a cow after Cuyyp,
And a goat skipping over a steeple.”

For as invitations are usually given some time in advance, it becomes desirable to carry the cards in the pocket-book, so as to avoid engaging oneself verbally for two parties in one evening. Now, if the invitation takes the shape of writing paper, of cardboard substance, doubled up into letter form, it is inconvenient to carry many of them about. So, if the hostess wishes popular people to come to her party, she had better do all in her power to help them to remember the date by having the invitation card always with them.

A very pretty mode of conveying the intelligence is to have a small photo portrait of the host and hostess in the corner or at the side (the small postage stamp photos are very cheap, and done in a few minutes), and so render the missive intrinsically interesting. Etched cards can also be obtained at the shops or made to order. There

are also what are called Paris cards of invitation, which invite the fortunate recipients to a series of entertainments during the season.

Due notice should be given to the guests. I have been to many parties got up, so to speak, on the spur of the moment, and found them most agreeable and enjoyable, the suddenness and the impromptu character imparting additional zest to the whole ; but it is not, as a rule, safe to trust to "happy-go-lucky," for sometimes it goes unlucky. I recollect being one evening a victim in this way. Several gentlemen had been invited to a social gathering at a short notice. When the evening arrived, I duly presented myself, and found a room full of ladies, the hostess apologising to me for being the only gentleman, as the others were all suddenly unable to attend. I was seriously alarmed to face at once so many fair faces, either of whom singly (for they were young and pretty) would have been delightful, and I seriously meditated a strategic movement. However, they were extremely agreeable, took pity on my desolate state, and I spent a most pleasant evening, not without wishing, however, for some one to share in its honours. Of course, this was a pure accident, but prudence suggests (where such a course is possible) the giving of good notice to your friends, to make sure of them, and to know how many to provide for. It also implies a greater compliment to your guests, by showing that you really are desirous of their company, and hope that they will come.





VII.

RECEPTION DAYS.

“As it fell upon a day.”

Shakespeare

FINE weather is very suggestive of visiting. When the air is bright and the saucy sunshine peeps into the windows, showing up many specks of dirt never dreamt of before, glinting into the new Queen Anne sideboard only purchased (a great bargain) last week, putting quite a look of new life into everything, and seeming to say as plainly as possible, “Isn’t this a capital day for paying those calls you were inwardly resolving to see about at the first opportunity.” And acting on the advice of the sun, you arrange the little household matters, tell the cook to put off dinner until a later hour, leave word that you will be back by a certain time, and with newly filled card-case sally forth into the open air, fully resolved to make “no end of calls.” Happy, happy resolve ! Pleasant, pleasant occupation ! But, alas, only to end (like a great many other human operations) in utter failure ; for at the first house you call at you are told that your friend has gone out to do the same as you are doing, and for the same reason—the fine weather. At the next house the same thing occurs, and when you arrive home, tired and weary, you can only say that you have found one or two out of your numerous circle of friends at home to receive you ; but you have your revenge, for there on the middle of the table, in that dainty Japanese card-basket, lie dozens of cards, emblems of friends all like-minded and disappointed as yourself. This result, which is of very frequent occurrence, has led some persons—indeed, a great many who have a large circle of friends—to adopt the plan of fixing one day in the week to stay at home and “receive” visitors. There are, of course, several draw-

backs. First there is the weather. I think it is Hood who sings—

“Come, *gentle* Spring ! Ethereal *mildness* come !
Oh ! Thomson, void of rhyme as well as reason,
How could'st thou thus poor human nature hum ?
There's no such season.

Who does not feel as if they had a *Spring*
Poured down their shoulders.”

In this capricious climate, where we sometimes have all the four seasons' temperature in one twenty-four hours, and where one day is fine and dry, and the next perhaps a regular deluge, it may sometimes happen (particularly to those who are not fortunate enough to possess a carriage) that on account of unpropitious weather they are unable to pay a visit on a particular day for weeks together, without running the risk of getting wet through, and laying up a large and inconvenient store of sore throats and bronchitis.

Then, again, as there are only six days in the week suitable for visiting, it follows in a large circle that three or four families must sometimes set apart the same day, and this, as philosophers tell us that a person cannot be in two places at once, of course increases the difficulty. However, the balance is in favour of fixing a day for receptions, particularly in not over large circles of friends ; for on the one hand all the “business” is transacted in one day by the hostess, and, on the other, the visitors are sure of finding their hostess at home, and not of having to call again if they really wish to speak to her, and they enjoy the advantage, when they call, of meeting congenial friends bent upon the same mission, and fully prepared with the latest “on dits” and pieces of mild scandal.





VIII.

DINNER PARTIES.

"A fine dinner was drest, both for him and his guests,
He was placed at the table above all the rest,
In a rich chair 'or bed' lin'd with fine crimson red,
With a rich golden canopy over his head ;
As he sat at his meat, the music played sweet,
With the choicest of singing his joys to compleat."

Percy's Reliques.

IF course people must eat and drink — if you invite them to your house for four or five hours they will all, sometime or other, feel hungry and thirsty. Lord Byron used to express great horror at ladies eating, and even himself occasionally would take at his friends' houses but the smallest of meals—after one such occasion he returned home, and a friend calling found him eating hugely ; thus showing that even a poet is *naturally* very much like other people.

Eat people *must*, but the question arises what kind of repast is to be provided? and it is a question which produces more alarm to the frugal housekeeper than does anything else connected with visitors. In the ancient times when art, literature, science, et cætera, were in embryo, and when the intellect was chiefly employed in providing nourishment for the bodily wants, it would follow as a matter of course that the highest compliment you could pay to visitors and the most sensible offering you could make would be to set before them the daintiest and most abundant kinds of food and drink.

And in reading of the days of chivalry, when everything was considered to have reached the climax of gallantry and politeness, the first thing in an entertainment which strikes the attention is an account of some gorgeous feast, and of the wonderful amount of eating and drinking which took place. There is a capital description of one of these feasts, written by the gentleman usher of the Cardinal,

conveys a lively picture of the romantic spirit of the sixteenth century. The banquet was provided by Cardina Wolsey at Hampton Court for the French Ambassadors, who came to negotiate a treaty between the Emperor, the King of France and the King of England. "Then there were made great preparations of all things for this great assembly at Hampton Court ; the Cardinal called before him his principal officers, as steward, treasurer, controller, and clerk of his kitchen, to whom he declared his mind touching the entertainment of the Frenchmen at Hampton Court, commanding them neither to spare for any cost, expense or travayle, to make such a triumphant banquet as they might not only wonder at here, but also make a glorious report of it in their own country, to the great honour of the King and his realm. To accomplish his commandment they sent out *caters*, purveyors, and divers other persons, my Lord's friends, to make preparation ; also they sent for all the expert cookes, and connyng persons in the art of cookerie which were within London or elsewhere that might be gotten to beautify this noble feast the purveyors provided, and my Lord's friends sent in such provision as one would wonder to have seen. The cookes wrought both day and night with subtleties and many crafty devices, where lacked neither gold, sylver, nor other costly thing, meet for their purpose ; the yeomen and groomes of the wardrobe were busied in hanging of the chambers, and furnishing the same with beds of silk and other furniture in every degree. Then my Lord Cardinal sent me (W. Cavendish), being his gentleman usher, with two other of my fellows thither, to foresee all things touching our rooms to be nobly garnyshed ; accordingly our pains were not small nor light but daily travelling up and down from chamber to chamber ; then wrought the carpenters, joiners, masons, and all other artificers necessary to be had to glorify this noble feast. There was carriage and re-carriage of plate, stuff, and other rich implement, so that there was nothing lacking that could be imagined or devised for the purpose. There was also provided two hundred and eighty beds, furnished with all manner of furniture to them belonging, too long particularly to be rehearsed, but all wise men do sufficiently know what *belongeth* to the furniture thereof, and that is sufficient *at this time to be said*. The day was come to the

Frenchmen assigned, and they ready assembled before the hour of their appointment, wherefore the officers caused them to ride to Hanworth, a place and parke of the Kinges, within three miles, there to hunt and spend the day until night, at which time they returned again to Hampton Court, and everyone of them was conveyed to their several chambers, having in them great fires, and wine to their comfort and relief, remaining there until their supper was ready. The chamber where they supped and banquetted was hanged with rich arras as all other were, and furnished with tall yeomen to serve. There were set tables round about the chambers banquet wise covered; a cupboard was there garnished with white plate, having also in the same chamber, to give more light, four great plates of sylver set with great lights, and a great fire of wood and coales. The next chamber, being the chamber of presence, was hanged with very rich arras, and a sumptuous cloth of estate furnished with many goodly gentlemen to serve the tables, ordered in manner as the other chamber was, saving that the high table was removed beneath the cloth of estate toward the middest of the chamber covered. Then there was a cupboard, being as long as the chamber was in breadth, with six desks of height garnished with guilt plate, and the nethermost desk was garnished all with gold plate, having with light one paire of candlesticks of sylver and guilt being curiously wrought, which cost 300 markes, and standing upon the same, two lights of waxe burning as bigge as torches to set it forth. This cupboard was barred round about, that no man could come nigh it, for there was none of all this plate touched in this banquet, for there was sufficient besides. The plates that did hang on the walls to give light were of sylver and guilt, having in them great pearches of waxe burning, a great fire burning in the chimney, and all other necessary for the furniture of so noble a feast. Now was all things in readiness, and supper time at hand, the principal officers caused the trumpetters to blow to warne to supper; the officers discreetly went and conducted these noblemen from their chambers into the chambers where they should suppe and caused them to sit downe, and that done, their service came up in such abundance, both costly and full of subtleties, and with such a pleasant voyse of instruments of *musicke*, that the Frenchmen, as it seemed, were wrapped

into a heavenly paradise. You must understand that my Lord Cardinal was not yet comen hither, but they were merry and pleasant with their fare and devised sottleties. Before the second course my Lord came in, booted and spurred, all sodainely amongst them, and bade them proface (much good may it do you), at whose coming there was great joy, with rising every man from his place, whom my Lord caused to sit still and keep their roomes, and being in his apparell as he rode, called for a chayre, and sat down in the middest of the high paradise, laughing, and being as merry as ever I saw hym in all my lyff. Anon came up the second course with so many dishes, sottleties, and devices, above a hundred in number, which were of so goodly proportion, and so costly, that I think the Frenchmen never saw the like—the wonder was no less than it was worthy indeed. There were castles with images in the same, Paul's Church, for the quality as well counterfeited as the painter should have painted it on a cloth or wall. There were beasts, birds, foules, and personages, and lykely made and counterfeited, some fighting with swords, some guns and cross-bows, some vaulting and leaping, some dancing with ladies, some on horses in complete harness, justing with long sharpe speares, with many more devices. Among all, one I noted was a chess board, made of spiced plate, with men there of the same, and for the good proportion, and because the Frenchmen be very cunning and expert in that play my Lord Cardinal gave the same to a gentleman of France, commanding there should be made a goodly case for the preservation thereof in all haste, that he might convey the same safe into his country. Then took my Lord a bole of gold filled with ipocrasse, and putting off his cap, said 'I drink to the King, my Sovereigne Lord, and next unto the King your master,' and therewith did drynke a good draught; and when he had done he desired the graund mastre to pledge him cup and all, the which was well worth 500 markes, and so caused all the lords to pledge these two royal princes. Then went the cup so merrily about, that many of the Frenchmen were fain to be led to their beds."

In the days of the Regency we find people acquiring a kind of notoriety from the number of bottles of wine they could imbibe at a sitting—a three-bottle man was quite *common*. *There is a funny story told of a gentleman*

attending a feast in the olden time. Being somewhat unused to this description of entertainment, he very prudently refrained from imbibing much wine. When the small hours came, and the guests were all more or less inebriated, the butler entered and proceeded to loosen the gentlemen's neckcloths. Our friend enquired simply the reason of this. "Oh" said the man promptly, "my orders are, sir, to loosen the gentlemen's neckcloths at this hour, for fear of their being choked."

And in the present day, when any number of people are to be publicly assembled for a charitable purpose, the common plan is to give a dinner and invite them to it. The usual price for a public dinner ticket is about a guinea, and the cost of a private dinner party, where the wines etc., are of the best, can seldom be given at a much less cost, so that no wonder the young host feels alarmed when the prospect of a dinner is mooted.

Sydney Smith gives a good description of a country dinner party. "Did you ever dine out in the country? What misery human beings inflict on each other under the name of pleasure! We went to dine last Thursday with Mr. —, a neighbouring clergyman, a haunch of venison being the stimulus to the invitation. We set out at five o'clock, drove in a broiling sun, on dusty roads, three miles, in our best gowns; found Squire and parsons assembled in a small hot room, the whole house redolent of frying; talked, as is our wont, of roads, weather, and turnips; that done, began to grow hungry, then serious, then impatient. At last a stripling, evidently caught up for the occasion, opened the door and beckoned our host out of the room. After some moments of awful suspense, he returned to us with a face of much distress, saying, 'The woman assisting in the kitchen had mistaken the soup for dirty water, and had thrown it away, so we must do without it; we all agreed perhaps it was as well we should, under the circumstances; at last, to our joy, dinner was announced; but oh, 'ye gods,' as we entered the dining room what a gale met our nose! the venison was high—the venison was uneatable, and was obliged to follow the soup with all speed.

"Dinner proceeded, but our spirits flagged under these accumulated misfortunes. There was an ominous pause between the first and second course; we looked each other in the face—what new disaster awaited us? The

pause became fearful. At last the door burst open, and the boy rushed in, calling out aloud, 'Please, sir, has Betty any right to leather I?' What human gravity could stand this? We roared with laughter; all took part against Betty, obtained the second course with some difficulty, bored each other the usual time, ordered our carriages, expecting our post boys to be drunk, and were grateful to providence for not permitting them to deposit us in a wet ditch."

The following account of a country dinner party in the beginning of the last century by Soame Jenyns, is very characteristic :—

"John, John, a coach !—I can't think who 'tis,
My lady cries, who spies your coach
Ere you the avenue approach ;
Lord, how unlucky !—washing day !
And all the men are in the hay !
Entrance to gain is somewhat hard,
The dogs all bark, the gates are barr'd ;
The yards with lines of linen cross'd,
The hall door's lock'd, the key is lost ;
These difficulties all o'ercome,
We reach at length the drawing room,
Then there's a trampling over head,
Madam you'd swear was brought to bed ;
Miss in a hurry bursts the lock,
To get clean sleeves to hide her smock ;
The servants run, the pewter clatters,
My lady dresses, calls, and chatters ;
The cook maid raves for want of butter,
Pigs squeak, fowls scream, and green geese flutter.
Now after three hours' tedious waiting,
On all our neighbours' faults debating,
And having nine times view'd the garden,
In which there's nothing worth a farthing,
In comes my lady and the pudden :
You will excuse, sir— on a sudden—
Then that we may have four and four,
The bacon, fowls, and colli-flow'r
Their ancient unity divide,
The top one graces, one each side ;
And by and bye the second course
Comes lagging like a distanc'd horse ;

A salver then to church and king,
The butler sweats, the glasses ring ;
The cloth removed, the toasts go round.

At last the ruddy sun quite sunk,
The coachman tolerably drunk,
Whistling o'er hillocks, ruts and stones,
Enough to dislocate one's bones,
We home return, a wond'rous token
Of Heaven's kind care, with limbs unbroken.
Afflict us not, ye gods, though sinners,
With many days like this, or dinners ! ”

I do not wish to cry down dinners *per se*—to make out that *because* an entertainment begins with a dinner that therefore it should be tabooed. Far from it ; but what I wish to make plain is that it is possible to entertain a large circle of nice visitors without ever giving a dinner party ! And I cannot think that it is desirable to cultivate any one's acquaintance whose only idea of enjoyment is to eat and drink dainty and curious food.

The meal par excellence for visitors is tea. And who does not remember Cowper's beautiful lines,

“ Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each ;
So let us welcome peaceful evening in.”

Raynal observes, “ The use of tea has contributed more to the sobriety of the Chinese than the severest laws, the most eloquent discourses, or the best treatise on morality.”

In naming tea I do not restrict the meaning to the beverage so named, since some persons of delicate organizations cannot take that particular liquid ; but I mean the meal which takes place at the close of the day, and at which may be taken tea, coffee, chocolate, cocoa, cocoatine, or any other similar beverage, accompanied with as much meat, vegetables, fruit etc., as may be considered desirable. Such meals are called by the names of meat tea, high tea, etc. They may take place in any room ; they never require full dress, nor even gloves—no arrangement of guests. Punctuality is not even absolutely necessary. Then there is no restraint ; everyone feels that the entertainment is to

be of a homely and sociable character, and the guests are at their ease directly. This is half the battle in entertaining visitors, and directly you have made them feel (so to speak) at home amongst themselves, and have got over the stiffness which everyone feels more or less when in anyone else's house, they will soon begin to amuse one another, each will produce his funny story, his interesting experience, etc., without being asked; and it is astonishing how easily we are entertained when in the humour for it.

As a general rule—only one, or at most two kinds of meat are required, a joint of cold meat, or some rissoles, a curry or meat pie, together with pastry, jellies, etc., fruit cakes, bread and butter, are all that need be provided, it not being intended to form a heavy repast. Yet if anyone has not had dinner, there is plenty of solid food provided to satisfy his appetite. One meal is quite sufficient in an evening, and should anything else be desired later, a little mulled wine, lemonade, beer, etc., with perhaps a few sandwiches, are all that are necessary.

To those who give dinner parties I would say always let your guests know what is prepared for them. Let each guest have a menu so that they may know what dishes are provided. Leave as little carving to be done by the guests as possible. Carving, unless to a person skilled in its mysteries, is a dreadful ordeal, and few things are more horrifying than a long row of hungry faces awaiting an obstinate leg, or inseparable wing. This can mostly be avoided by having dishes in the French style, or should the appearance of a joint be desired on table, let it be placed on the table, and afterwards removed and then carved by the servants at the sideboard. The table itself can be dressed with the dessert, flowers, etc. Have the cruets divided up as much as possible, that is, have small salts, peppers, and mustards, one of each between each pair of guests, so as to avoid the necessity of passing these condiments about the table—vinegar and oil are not generally so much in request.

When you expect many, write the names of the guests and place them as you desire them to sit at table. On entering the room they will see their names and take their places without further ceremony. I have seen a very *unpleasant* quarter of an hour spent in a kind of Darwinian

game of the "selection of the fittest," which the above-mentioned plan of procedure would have avoided. Take care that your feast is ready at the appointed time, and if you then have (allowing a quarter hour's grace) all your guests excepting one or two, it is well (unless they are very important indeed) to begin, and not to have everyone else's dinner spoilt because these were unpunctual. And generally try to ameliorate the horrible time before the feast, when everybody is hungry, stiff, and awkward, by receiving your guests personally, and cheerfully talking to them and making them on good terms one with another.





IX.

"FIVE O'CLOCK TEA."

"No, I'll certainly wait. Five o'clock is not far off
And then I'm certain."

Leigh Hunt.

HAVE you ever, my fair reader, been to a five o'clock tea? If not, let me attempt to describe one. The process begins by your meeting a friend in the street, and her saying to you, after the usual polite enquiries "I hope you'll come to my five o'clock tea on such a day," to which of course (and without remembering for a moment that you have already half promised yourself elsewhere at that time) you immediately give your consent. On the eventful day, dressed in the most approved style, you find yourself in front of the street door, an umbrella in one hand and a muff in the other. The knocker (although a good honest knocker in its way) appals you; "Suppose" (you mentally observe) "I were to split my glove with that knocker." At last, however, you summon courage and give a faint tap, and the door being opened you enter, and find your hostess delighted to see you. You are requested to be seated and you sit down, still of course keeping your umbrella in one hand, the other being engaged with your muff. Being punctual, you have your friend all to yourself, and everything is very pleasant. Presently other guests arrive, and you form a nice little party. Then tea is introduced by the maid, who is a prim young woman, neatly dressed, and with the most correct five o'clock tea manners. She bears upon a small salver a few tiny, but exquisite cups of inviting tea, together with a cream jug, sugar basin, etc. She approaches you first, and with the umbrella hand you take a cup. The cup is yours, but it contains plain tea which requires sweetening. Then *your misery begins*—for though it *is* possible to hold an

umbrella and a tea-cup, it is impossible to help yourself to sugar with this appendage. You dare not (being naturally of high moral principles) put down the umbrella, and the maid would not for the world commit such a fearful mistake as to notice your embarrassment, much more to help you to the sweet substance; yet the snow white sugar lies nestling in its delicate blue-tinted basin, tempting, but inaccessible. An awkward pause ensues—you are conscious that the visitor by your side is watching you; the maid's back being towards the hostess, the latter does not see the difficulty. First you think you will put the cup down, but then you reflect that the maid will take it as a sign you do not require it, and will walk to the next guest, then you think you might place it in your lap, you try, but then the umbrella slips in and by bumping on the ground, the downward motion nearly knocks cup and all out of your hand. You begin to feel very hot and uncomfortable and secretly wish you had never accepted the invitation. Moments are precious and you get desperate, and at last summoning up all your resolution you push your left hand through your muff, leaning the wretched umbrella against your arm, and hold the cup with it, then help yourself to cream and sugar with the right hand, inwardly resolving that never again will you bring an umbrella and a muff to a "Five o'clock Tea."

These little repasts have many good qualities. They are very brief, yet very enjoyable. Everyone is at their best—the toilets are of the smartest—the spirits are at their highest, and the cost is of the smallest. You can see many friends, hear plenty of news, and pay off several reciprocal entertainments with a minimum of outlay and trouble—simply a few cups of tea! Then again your visitors require no amusements, for they amuse one another. They have enough to occupy them physically in imbibing the daintily flavoured decoction, and they bring their own items of news and gossip. Five o'clock teas afford an excellent opportunity for making arrangements for more elaborate parties, excursions, etc., and for conveying information about societies, clubs, work-parties, etc. They also form an excellent opportunity (so delightful to the fair ones) for wearing the last new "costume" or the *Tam o'Shanter hat*. They are of course more appropriate to towns, from the nature of the entertainment, and are generally restricted to ladies. And what is more delicious, particu-

larly when there is a nice lawn and a little shade, or a garden tent, to sit and sip the sweetened compound, and to listen to the delicate wit and merry peals of laughter as each new topic is mentioned, and all the various bits of news which have come to light since the last meeting. There is another *raison d'être* for five o'clock teas. It is, that they supply an incentive for a walk. One of the most necessary items for health's sake is to take plenty of exercise, but walking for walking's sake is dull work, and one cannot go shopping every afternoon without spending plenty of money, and so the usual result is staying at home ; but when there is an entertainment of this social character, which is sure to be interesting walking, there is a strong inducement to take health-giving exercise. And it is wonderful how far one can walk and how much exertion can be undergone when sufficient stimulus for it exists. One never *thinks* of being tired, and is surprised to learn afterwards how many miles have been traversed without the experience of the least fatigue.





X.

KETTLEDRUMS, ROUTS, CRUSHES.

“ There’s pippins and cheese to come.”

Sir H. Evans.

IN speaking of drums I don’t mean those musical (?) instruments which formed a feature in Queen Elizabeth’s feasts. Just fancy Her gracious and vigorous Majesty being regaled during her midday meal with trumpets and drums ! How we must have degenerated from the good old days ! What I intend is the kind of entertainment bearing the title variously expressed above. It is a reception of visitors for a short time, as contrasted with a regular evening party ; and it carries with it many advantages. It does not tax the vigour and endurance of its votaries like dancing, and is equally appropriate for the young, the old, the strong and the feeble. It does not involve an elaborate preparation, yet it is more important and more highly estimated than a simple high tea, not requiring evening dress, and finishing at a time which may be reconciled with (by those who are fond of) early hours.

The entertainment usually lasts about three hours, but there is no fixed time, and the better way is to state upon the cards of invitation, say from — to —, as may be thought desirable. It is well to throw open all the reception rooms, so that visitors may have ample opportunity for promenading about, and not be crowded. One of the most important items is to have plenty of sitting accommodation ; the usual mode is to hire the so-called rout seats, which are long, flat, caned forms, with or without red cushions laid upon them. These are usually placed along the walls, so that visitors may have that support to their backs ; an arrangement however which has this disadvantage, that no matter how clean the gentlemen’s coats and ladies’ dresses may be (and who would dream of going to a *polite* assembly in a dirty dress or coat ?) there is always

left upon the paper where people have been sitting quite sufficient of *something* to form a permanent disfigurement to the delicately tinted walls of the apartment, and quite enough to make the hostess uneasy when she perceives it next morning.

“Yes, spite of all the water soused aloft,
Soap, plain and mottled, hard and soft,
Soda and pearlash, huckaback and sand,
Brooms, brushes, palm of hand,
And scourers in the office strong and clever,
In spite of all the tubbing, rubbing, scrubbing,
The routing and the grubbing,
The blacks, confound them ! were as black as ever.”

A much better plan therefore is to have chairs which can easily be procured, and if necessary fastened in small rows of, say five or six, and placed either against the walls, leaving the space in the centre of the room free for the perambulations of the guests, or to place them back to back about the room, leaving sufficient space between the blocks as gangways. The expense is about the same in either case, and the result in having clean walls and nothing to regret, wonderful. The refreshments consist of tea, coffee, wines, wine “cups,” lemonade, bread and butter, cakes, sandwiches, fruits, ices, and jellies, and it is a good plan to have some tables placed the long way of the refreshment room, with sufficient space behind for the maids to move about and assist the guests to what they require. It is well not to have any, or at least very few, seats in the refreshment room, as they occupy floor space, and generally get in the way when not occupied, and the guests have usually rested in the other rooms and can well stand here. This plan also promotes a constant change in the visitors to this department, and enables a greater number to taste its provisions. Another point to be borne in mind is to have (if possible) this department in a room near the exit and entrance rather than at the end of a suite of rooms, because it affords facility for the removal and replacement of glass, crockery, food, etc., without disturbing the guests, and because it keeps the eating by itself ; a very desirable arrangement, for it is most disagreeable to hear during the process of a song, a sustained clatter of spoons, forks, and tea cups in an adjoining apartment. *Those of my readers who have listened to a concert stand-*

ing at the side of the centre transept of the Crystal Palace will have a good idea of this state of things—first they get a few bars of a beautiful canzonet of Albani—then they experience a rattle of tea cups and saucers at the refreshment table—then a mixture of the two until they are ready to leave the place from sheer vexation. By having the refreshment room near to the exit, many who have not had an opportunity to visit it before are enabled to pop in for a moment at leaving, instead of going away hungry and dissatisfied. A great point is always to have a good supply of clean cups, etc., for it is very unpleasant to approach the counter to procure refreshment for a lady and to find that, although there is an abundance of delicious niceties, yet there is not a single clean plate to put them on ; and it would be well for the hostess herself to occasionally pop in and see that her maids are well up to their work, and that her visitors are properly attended to.

The entertainments usually take place in the summer, when not much additional clothing is worn, and therefore the provision for hats, cloaks, etc., need not be very elaborate. Still there are some people who resemble the poor man who instructed the Russian King how to keep warm by "always carrying the whole of his wardrobe on his back," and never seem perfectly happy unless they are provided for every kind of weather, so that some place must be set apart for the reception of these outward adornments ; and this should be near the entrance and exit and should be placed in the charge of one of the servants. And if a numerous party be expected it is well to have a few numbers written in duplicate, so as to make each article easy to find. And here let me give gentlemen a hint that it is a capital plan to have only an opera hat, and if possible no overcoat (they usually, for the sake of the patent boots and spotless trousers, come in a carriage or cab), by this means they can come and go without any fuss when they like, and without any elaborate looking for missing or hidden garments.

It is a good plan, if the weather is at all doubtful, to have some kind of shelter, if there is much length of forecourt, as many dresses, etc., would be spoiled by walking under a sudden shower, especially upon wet paving stones or gravel.

Another hint may not be out of place. Sometimes a man from the neighbourhood is hired to assist the regular

staff of domestics upon an occasion of this kind, and these individuals (useful enough in their proper position) have, from long experience, a keen eye to their own advantage, and accordingly, whenever the guests are leaving, they station themselves near the door of exit, so that when any visitors feel inclined to give the regular servants a small gratuity at leaving, this man politely holds out his hand and pockets the tip. At other times, an impudent street Arab will stand at the garden gate, and levy a kind of black mail for shutting people's carriages, etc.

It will be found generally desirable to provide a little music. This may be by arranging beforehand with friends to take a part either in solos, part music, duets, etc. It will be well to have these pieces at intervals, so as to allow of plenty of conversation between, for notwithstanding its great attraction, there are some well informed people who do not care for music, and are naturally fond of talking. Rennie, the great engineer who constructed Waterloo Bridge, tells us in his memoirs that he never could distinguish one tune from another, and that he preferred the bagpipes to any other kind of music (?)

If there is, therefore, too much music, these people begin to talk, and nothing is so unpleasant either to those who wish to listen, or to those who are kind enough to sing, as to have their efforts drowned in a loud hum of conversation. If people are allowed their full swing occasionally, they will be more disposed to listen when they should do so. And, again, it is usual, and indeed desirable, that every one should keep still and not walk about during a song; and if the music is constantly going no one will have any opportunity of getting any refreshment, or of greeting their friends in other parts of the room. For the same reason it is desirable to place the piano in the saloon which is most remote from the door of entrance, as by this means those who are not fond of music have an opportunity of retiring from its influence. Another suggestion I would make is that a competent accompanist should be provided—an amateur is preferable, of course; but if this be unattainable, then a professional may be engaged for a modest sum, as there are many competent professionals who would gladly earn a small fee in this way when not otherwise engaged. I lay *great stress upon this*, as I have often been at entertain-

ments of this pleasant character where gentlemen who possessed capital voices, and a good knowledge of vocal music, and who came provided with songs to sing, were unable to do so because no one would venture to play the accompaniment. It is true that one gentleman, with a courage which would do credit to a soldier, finding that not player was at hand, boldly stood up and sang his song without the aid of an instrumental accompaniment; and that another for the same reason, gave a violin solo, which was literally a solo! But as a rule any rhythmical accompaniment is better than none. Albert Smith, in his inimitable entertainment, "Mont Blanc," used to relate that when in bed at one of the hotels in Switzerland, his attention was attracted by curious sounds proceeding from an adjoining apartment, and on going to discover the cause of them, he found a youthful genius playing upon a *tin* fiddle, and accompanying himself by kicking a loose board under his foot. Albert Smith purchased a similar fiddle, and used to produce it and give a *fac simile* illustration, which of course convulsed his audience. Everybody, however, does not possess the mimic powers of an Albert Smith, and speaking generally, a well played piano-forte accompaniment will be more appreciated by the audience than that of a loose board, however rhythmically it may be kicked.

It is a good plan to enquire beforehand the names of the songs which your friends propose to sing, and print them neatly in the form of a programme. In these days of cheapness this costs but little, and will be greatly appreciated both by singers and guests, for many like to know the titles of songs; and it is very embarrassing when you have just heard some piece of enchanting melody to have to rush up to the singer (probably an entire stranger) and ask "the name of that song you have just sung so beautifully." It is very desirable, also, to provide music-stands, both for sitting and standing, when an instrumental piece is going to be performed. I remember on one occasion a gentleman was going to play a flute solo, and after looking round in vain for a pedestal stand, he produced a small pocket folding-desk. This, by some untoward accident and from its rickety form, fell down and smashed to pieces on the spot! What was to be done? At last a pile of books was made to support the music, and the player set to work as best he could.

Surely if we desire an instrumental performance, we can hardly expect the performer to bring his own music-desk and appliances, any more than we can expect a pianist to bring his own pianoforte and music-stool ! And if we appraise true music at its proper value, we shall not scruple to provide the appliances which may be necessary for its pleasant performance.

And while upon the subject of music, I may say that at entertainments of this description it is not advisable to "pitch" the music at too high a standard. Music, for a mixed company, should be *mostly* vocal. A good and simple song carefully sung will give more general pleasure at such a time than an elaborate piece of concerted music of a classical character, however well it may be rendered, and however intrinsically beautiful it may be. The general tone of these meetings is of a light, genial, and simple kind, and everything therefore, from the first invitation down to the last good bye, should partake of this character. It is the great charm, and should be carefully maintained.

A few flowers, judiciously arranged in places which would be otherwise a refuge for the destitute, add pleasantly to the general effect, for flowers have this peculiar privilege—that they are never out of place or time ; they are never out of keeping with their surroundings, for they are complete in themselves ; and they add a charm to everything else. As Longfellow says in the "Golden Legend"—

" Elsie : Here are flowers for you,
But they are not all for you ;
Some of them are for the Virgin
And for Saint Cecilia.

Prince Henry : As thou standest there
Thou seemst to me like the angel
That brought the immortal roses
To Saint Cecilia's bridal chamber.

Elsie : But these will fade.

Prince Henry : Themselves will fade,
But not their memory ;
And memory has the power
To recreate them from the dust.
They remind me, too,

Of martyred Dorothea,
Who from the celestial gardens sent
Flowers as her witnesses
To him who scoffed and doubted."

A fireplace, which in summer is at the best an ungainly void, may be rendered by the introduction of a few well-selected flowers and small shrubs and a little green baize, a most beautiful and attractive object, and quite an ornament to any room. A bare lobby, an ugly doorway, an untenanted shelf may each be made charming by the introduction of plants purchased for a few shillings at the nearest nurseryman's. But whatever is done in this way let everything be neat and smart, for nothing is so depressing and destructive of real enjoyment as a lot of half-dead flowers, dried up for want of a little water. Flowers, particularly in a hot room, require a good deal of water, and if they do not obtain it their leaves begin to droop and wither up. If, therefore, your plants be in pots (the best way to make them *last*), see that saucers are placed under each and filled with water; or, if they be cut flowers, let them be stuck in wet sand or moss, and you will then have the satisfaction of seeing them as fresh at the end of your friends' visit as at the beginning. There are many little contrivances of glass and crockery arranged as receptacles for cut flowers which show them off to great advantage, besides providing the necessary hydrostatic arrangements. There is a great deal of knack in disposing the various kinds of flowers, so as to exhibit their peculiar beauties. Bear in mind the habits of the different flowers. Thus, some are tall and branching, like the spirea, with its graceful spikes of feathery blooms; others are naturally rounder and flatter, like the cyclamen, aster, pansy, etc. Some have a very *prononcé* colour, like the scarlet geranium; and others are more remarkable for their perfume than their beauty, such as the mignonette and violet. Do not, as some people do in making a bank of flowers, put the dumpy flowers in the centre, and dot the spireas and fuchsias about anywhere, without order or arrangement, setting the mignonette on the table and the cyclamen and other bright flowers at the window. Rather put the scented plants where the air will waft *their perfume* into the room—in such a position as near an

open window or door, for instance. And in arranging a fireplace bank, let the tall and branching plants be at the back ; then put the dwarf shrubs in front of them, and keep the geraniums and cinerarias for the foreground, arranged according to their tints. By this means each plant will be seen to advantage, and will not eclipse something else. And, above all things, see that you have plenty of green about flowers ; the latter never look so well as when they are surrounded with green. They are so in a state of nature, and art will do well to copy nature in the juxtaposition of tints. Nothing is so distressing as to see a lot of blooms of some bright flower bound up in a heap, without a particle of green to relieve the blaze of colour. This fact has recently been duly recognized in the arrangement of those plants naturally deficient in leafiness. Thus, we now see the crocus and snowdrop, which are weak in greenery, planted into grass plots, by which means their beauty is greatly enhanced by their surroundings : and besides, the green shrubs are much less expensive and more durable than the flowers as a rule—an important consideration for frugal housekeepers.

It is very desirable to have a few objects of art on view, to entertain those whose tastes incline that way. They may be a portfolio of prints—some coins—photographs—even the now almost neglected stereoscope, when supplied with manageable glass transparencies, is admissible—collections of natural objects when not cumbersome or too extensive and abstruse—in short, anything which may be pleasant to look at and examine. The great desideratum in exhibited objects is to avoid anything liable to upset or difficult to adjust. Let everything be of a simple, *easily understood*, and popular character. For instance, a microscope at such a time is inappropriate, for those who do not understand its management are sure to smash the object or disarrange the glasses through sheer ignorance—possibly with the best intentions of “improving something or other” about it ; and even when everything is perfectly adjusted, not one person in a dozen will care at such a time to interest themselves with it. Again, beautiful glass or fragile china (possibly heirlooms, prized beyond a measure from their associations) should not be left to the tender and unforeseen mercies of a flowing *dress*, or the accidental brush of an arm, however *beautifully shaped*, which may destroy in a moment an object

which has been a source of infinite delight for years. For the same reason it would be well to remove all tables and sideboards not actually needed at the time, so as to leave as much space as possible available for visitors.





XI.

GARDEN PARTIES.

"Abused mortals, did you know
Where joy, heart's ease, and comfort grow,
You'd scorn proud towers,
And seek them in these bowers,
Where winds sometimes our woods perhaps may shake,
But blust'ring care could never tempest make,
Nor murmurs e'er come nigh us,
Saving of fountains that glide by us."

Sir H. Wotton.

EVEN a fine day, a large lawn, and merry company, and what is more enjoyable than a garden party? Every one is in the best of spirits, dressed in their finest attire, and disposed to make themselves most agreeable to every one around them. Lady 'A. has some most delicious anecdotes to tell of Mrs. B.'s wedding last week—how the bride looked, and how many bridesmaids there were, and how nervous the bridegroom was; and Mr. G. is blandly informing his friends that he has just received his majority in the——th Regiment, and that he will have to leave England on the ——th for the West Indies; and the Rev. Mr. M. is relating his experience of the difficulties of forming a working men's club in the village, and how he managed to overcome them, and make it a great success; and everybody is laughing, and flirting, and enjoying themselves in that pleasant fashion which comes so naturally upon such an occasion. But then the weather has a great deal to do with it, and I have a lively recollection of a country garden party where everything had been prepared for weeks beforehand—where a fine military band had been obtained from London, amusements of every description suitable for the ground provided, tents erected, sumptuous refreshments supplied, and everything which could minister to the gratification

of a very large and brilliant company, which was graced, moreover, by the presence of royalty ; and yet, when the day opened, the sky was overcast, and before noon and for the rest of the day the envious rain came down in unmitigated fury. *There*, in the tents, stood and sat the melancholy guests, hoping at least for a few minutes' interval of dry weather, and resolved to do wonders if they could get but a chance ; everything was prepared for croquet, archery, etc., etc., but all to no purpose, and the visitors, had at last to go back to their homes with the poor consolation that it was "thro' no fault of theirs." Always endeavour, in settling a garden party, to try and have it at a time when the weather seems fairly settled, and not give too long a notice beforehand. A long notice is polite, of course, and is calculated to make sure of your guests ; but in a case like this, and in a country like ours, where the weather is proverbially treacherous, prudence suggests a short notice. The weather in the autumn, for instance, is generally more settled than in the spring or early summer. The next great consideration is the lawn—

"A green like velvet neat,
Soft to the eye and to the feet ;
Where od'rous plants in evening fair,
Breathe all around ambrosial air."

But here, of course, nothing much can be done to *help*—for to those who have a nice big lawn the matter is simple, and those who have a small one cannot make it bigger at a moment's notice. Yet it is curious to notice how many people have good lawns, and all the appliances for accommodating such parties, and yet never turn them to account ; they prefer giving a troublesome and costly dance or two in the winter, or a rout or two in the summer, to a healthy and sensible garden party, where late hours, hot crowded rooms, and unseasonable feeding are avoided. At garden parties the refreshment department should be as near to the house as possible, so as to enable fresh supplies of eatables, plates, etc., to be brought ; but if it be desirable to have it further away—say in a tent—then let there be means provided for washing up glasses, plates, etc., as they are wanted, for it is wonderful how soon an apparently large stock gets dirty and requires renewal.

If possible, it is also better not to use for such a pur-

pose anything of a valuable character—very fragile glass, etc.—as at such times there always exists a much greater risk of things being broken, and no one is very critical about the intrinsic beauty of the vessels so long as they are scrupulously clean and suitable, and that the substances that are placed upon them and the fluids they contain are of the proper quality.

A great deal of the enjoyment of garden parties arises from their being a welcome change from the restrictions of full-dress entertainments.

“ The grave air’d soul, inclin’d to sport,
Renounces wisdom’s sullen pomp,
And loves the floral game—to romp.”

There is a feeling of freedom from constraint, and from the dread of “ what will the world say,” in everything that partakes of *rural* pursuits—whether it be in a visit to the country, or in a lesser degree at a garden party in town. Nature is unconstrained, free and flowing in all her developments ; and never fails to convey to the eye a like sense of untrammelled enjoyment.

Of course it would be impossible, and indeed undesirable, to make every garden party a pic-nic ; but the more it is made to resemble one the more successful will it be. For instance, I have said that it is desirable to have the supply of refreshments near the house, and of course it is also desirable to have the servants to bring supplies on clean plates, etc. ; but a great portion of the waiting may be done by the gentlemen, if only the example of doing so is set by the host. Depend upon it, half the pleasure will (oddly enough) be due to this cause—not because the labour of carrying dishes, knives, and forks is of itself very delightful, but because it implies an absence of observing eyes, and affords lots of opportunities for little gallantries.

The nervous young gentleman, who so constantly asks whether he can “ make himself useful in any way,” especially will be only too glad to have an excuse to speak to the fair ones, even when that consists in the prosaic enquiry of “ whether they will take a little chicken and ham ?” I am sure, too, that the ladies will prefer to listen to the pretty little compliments of the amateurs, and to rally them upon their want of experience in the matter, *than to hear the matter-of-fact* “ Will you take anything

else, ma'am?" of the professional waiter. We are often told that we might take a lesson from the Americans; but "From what (says Mr. Day*) the Correspondent to the New York print affirms, even 'assemblies' at the White House (Washington) are not over and above remarkable for the etiquette they display. During Polk's administration, it appears such marked rowdyism was evinced whenever the President issued invitations, that the practice of giving solid refreshments was relinquished. On one occasion, lemonade happened to be served to the numerous guests. A gentleman seized a pitcher and tumbler, and gallantly proffered drink to the ladies by whom he was surrounded. The manner was *unique*. He would fill the tumbler and hand it to one, and when she had drunk he would pour all that remained in the glass on the carpet; refill the vessel and hand it to another, and again pour out the dregs, until both the carpet and the dress of every lady in his vicinity was utterly ruined.'

It is a good plan to have a few small rustic tables conveniently placed; for although a lady always does show a wonderful power of contrivance when managing, in the presence of her *cher ami*, a plate upon her lap, yet to cut anything solid with a glass of wine resting at the same time upon the plate, is at all times a hazardous proceeding, and many a splendid and beautiful dress has been irretrievably ruined by a cataract of wine poured down the front of it. And however much good-nature may be exhibited by the fair wearer, and however many charming qualities it may show her to possess, it is sad to think that a small and inexpensive table placed near would have obviated the whole occurrence; and have prevented painful reflections afterwards. These tables need not be, indeed should not be large, and they would be better if made of rustic wood—an ingenious man with a little spare time might soon manufacture a dozen—but in any case they can be purchased in any number at a very small cost, and could be stowed away during the winter or wet weather in the summer house.

Although a great deal of the pleasure of these parties is derived from the interchange of conversation between friends and acquaintances, and from the pleasure of being in the open air under such agreeable circumstances, yet

* "Life and Society in America," S. P. Day.

some amusements must be provided for those energetic individuals who never seem quite happy unless they are exercising their firm and vigorous muscles in some athletic sport. Archery, Lawn-Tennis, Badminton Croquet, etc., have each their admirers, and form very sensible modes of exhibiting one's skill and address, and it would be well to provide the necessary implements for some of these.

One great desideratum is to have a tent (or tents) both to keep off the sun and wind, and afford a place of agreeable shelter for those who are not joining in the sports. It also forms a temporary refuge from a slight shower, although of course rain is fatal to the undertaking altogether by making the lawn unuseable. Some garden seats with awnings over are very useful, for being light in weight, they can be moved about to suit the requirements of the moment. They are better not too large; in fact, if most of them accommodated only *two*, they would be considered by *many* young ladies and gentlemen as quite capacious enough, on the principle that "two's company and three's none." There are some very comfortable chairs of French manufacture made all of iron, very easy to sit in, very strong, and at a price which places them within the reach of all. Being very light and firm they will bear a deal of moving about, and will be found a useful addition to the ordinary garden seats. Some with arms should be provided for our elderly friends, whose cheerful smile and approval should never be absent from such festive gatherings.

And now a word about the lawn itself. Few people who have been to Hampton Court Palace can have helped noticing the beautiful grass which surrounds it. So soft, so fine, so springy, so turfy; quite different from the stumpy, brown, patchy, earthy-looking thing which (particularly near town) although going by the name of The Lawn, looks at the best more like a recently cut meadow than anything else, and still fewer people seem to know how to construct or keep a lawn in order. Yet the process is a very simple one. I assisted in producing a London lawn which will stand (of its kind) comparison with any, and the mode of procedure was as follows:—First, the spot was determined and marked out. Then the soil was dug over, and carefully levelled, some well rotted manure *being mixed with it*; and the whole well rolled and beaten

down. And here I may say that the ground was not made rich, as grass grows finest on poor, moist soil. Then it was laid down with turfs carefully placed, and thoroughly watered and rolled. And this latter treatment repeated from time to time, the bald places being supplied with new turfs, or sown occasionally with fresh grass seed. This was done in the autumn, and in the spring it was, and has remained ever since, quite perfect. It is covered with beautiful grass, and is as flat as a billiard table.

But how often do we see miserable lawns with scarce any grass left, particularly after a season of dry weather, the owners seeming to imagine that however much attention is bestowed upon flowers, fruit, etc., the lawn may be left to take care of itself. And so when it is wanted (and it is of course most used in dry, sunny weather) it is in wretched disorder. A lawn requires to be regularly cut and rolled if it is to be kept in a smart and green condition, and, above all things, it must be kept well watered. The best way to do this is to have a hose, say three-quarter inch in diameter, of vulcanized india rubber, with a brass nozzle and spreader, and attached to a supply cistern at a suitable height, and whenever the lawn is dry and no rain has fallen to let it be well watered, not merely just moistened, but well soaked—for one good soaking is worth a dozen sprinklings. Then it ought to be cut as often as the grass grows long, and this is best done by a machine except when the lawn is new, when a scythe will be required on account of the length of the grass. A machine is also preferable because it takes the growth off evenly, and does not leave marks in the turf as the scythe usually does when handled by amateur gardeners, and again when two or three members of the family help to pull the machine the work is soon done, whereas only one person at a time can use a scythe. An iron roller is best, as the stone ones wear unevenly, and are apt to leave marks behind them—rolling should be done when the grass is wet; after a good shower or wet day is best, as the turf is then at its softest and most yielding state—of course, those who go rolling wet grass should have waterproof boots on, or else change their boots directly afterwards or they may suffer from getting their feet wet through. It is better to root up all daisy, plantain, and thistle roots with a strong fork

or thistle spud, as they are apt to spread and make the lawn unsightly. A lawn improves with age as any one may see at Hampton Court, or Castle Howard, in Yorkshire. In fact there are no lawns like old lawns ; the turf seems to improve by age, getting finer, and more rooty and elastic, and few things are more pleasant to the eye in the summer than a well kept lawn with the grass all green and flourishing, and the surface as smooth as a billiard table just ironed. As Lady Montague charmingly observes :

“ Planting succeeds, and avenues are rais’d,
Canals are cut, and mountains level made ;
Bowers of retreat, and galleries of shade ;
The shaven turf present a lively green ;
The bordering flow’rs in mystic knots are seen.”

A garden party, particularly a large one, can hardly be said to be complete unless some music is provided, and those who can afford it often engage a small military band ; this is doing the thing handsomely, of course, but a somewhat less expensive mode is desirable for most people. The chief difficulty is that an ordinary quadrille (string) band is not well adapted for the open air ; a reed band, however, would do very well. Some people have unaccompanied part-singing, and this is very agreeable, and might, by a judicious selection of easy pieces, be done by the visitors themselves, who would thus, of course, be perfectly satisfied with the performance. Some people move their pianoforte out on the lawn, and I know one instance of a gentleman who used to hire a street organ to amuse his guests. Whether anyone has ever hired a “hurdy-gurdy” I am not prepared to say, but I should not advise anyone to try the experiment without careful consideration. Music is, however not an *absolute* necessity, and very pleasant garden parties may be given without it.





XII.

MUSIC—VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL.

"They had noe sooner these pleasant words spoke,
But in comes the beggar cladd in a silke cloke ;
A faire velvet capp, and a fether had hee,
And now a musicyan forsooth he would bee."

Percys' Reliques.

MS a means of entertaining a mixed company of guests, music is unquestionably the most effectual. It speaks a language understood by every nation and every people. It hurts no one's prejudices, and stirs up no angry passions. Its privilege is to soothe the mind, to harmonise the soul, and to awaken all the better feelings of our nature. It is common ground upon which everyone may meet, and a subject in which persons of totally different aims and characters may, nevertheless, entirely agree.

There are many different kinds of music, vocal and instrumental, from the simple ballad to the elaborate cantata, or from the instrumental solo to the grand symphony, and of course everything depends upon what resources you have to draw upon. And here again a great deal rests upon the hostess ; for if she be musical she will naturally gather round her a lot of musical friends, and will be able, at short notice, to get up any amount of ear enchanting melody. And a great deal is included in this. You must work up the musical talent of your friends. You must encourage them to cultivate music, both by example and precept, such as by having little "musical evenings" at each other's houses if possible, and then, by using a little tact, you will soon bring out a lot of unsuspected talent, not perhaps of the very highest order, but always interesting and improving. Numbers of young ladies and gentlemen give up singing or playing when they have fair ability for one or the other.

simply because no one seems to want to listen to them, or at least to sympathise with them in their tastes. How beautiful it is to know a musical family where each member does something to help, either by playing some instrument, or singing some song, or taking part in a duet or trio. There is no space left for dulness or ennui. In the olden days when musical instruments were scarcer and more expensive, people used to cultivate singing unaccompanied—part-songs, glees, catches, etc., and nearly everyone could then do a little at it; thus we read in a note in “Walton’s Complete Angler,” 5th Edition, 1791:—“At the time when Walton wrote, and long before, music was so generally well understood, that a man who had any voice or ear was always supposed to be able to sing his part in a madrigal or song at sight.” Peacham requires of his gentleman only to be able “to sing his part sure, and at first sight; and withal to play the same on the viol or lute.” (Peacham’s *Complete Gentleman*, p. 100.)

And *Philomathes* in Morley’s excellent *Introduction to Practical Musick*, (fol., London, 1597), thus complains (at the banquet of Master Sophobulus):—“Supper being ended, and musick books, according to custom, being brought to table, the mistress of the house presented me with a part, earnestly requesting me to sing. But when after many excuses, I protested unfeignedly that I could not, everyone began to wonder; yea, some whispered to others, demanding how I was brought up: so that, upon shame of mine ignorance, I go now to seek out mine old friend, Master Gnorimus, to make myself his scholar.”

Now-a-days, except the few who belong to choral societies, no one seems able or cares to take a part in a madrigal or glee, charming as they are. Abroad they manage things much better in this respect, for it is quite a common thing to see there a family in which every member plays an instrument or sings, and performs very creditably. The great idea to be borne in mind is to get everybody to do *what they can*, and it is surprising how much can be done in the (musical as well as every other) line, if only each person tries his utmost. Many people have an idea that because they cannot sing or play “like a professional” it is no use playing or singing at all; but *what a false notion* this is! People never remain silent *because they cannot* talk like Coleridge or Sydney Smith.

Then why should they be silent because they cannot play like Rubenstein or sing like Sims Reeves? You will find (as Mr. Disraeli did) that your "party" requires "educating," and that if it is to be done you must do it yourself. In the first place you must make it a custom always to ask your guests to perform something either vocal or instrumental; if possible leading off yourself, and you must take a manifest interest in the transaction, and above all see that your guests pay attention to it, and not (as they do in many houses) begin to talk out as though the music were not worth listening to. Surely, if ladies or gentlemen are kind enough to be at the trouble of playing or singing a piece of music, they may, at least, hope to have a polite hearing. By this means everyone will get to feel that music is expected of them, and will be received with approbation and interest and they will get up new pieces, and practice their old ones, until you will have drawn around you a large coterie of music-loving friends. Washington Irving gives a quaint description of country music. "The orchestra was in a small gallery, and presented a most whimsical grouping of heads, piled one above the other, among which I particularly noticed that of the village tailor, a pale fellow with a retreating forehead and chin, who played upon the clarionet, and seemed to have blown his face to a point; and there was another, a short puffy man, stooping and labouring at a bass viol, so as to show nothing but the top of a round bald head, like the egg of an ostrich. There were two or three pretty faces among the female singers, to which the keen air of a frosty morning had given a bright rosy tint; but the gentlemen choristers had evidently been chosen, like old Cremona fiddles, more for tone than looks; and as several had to sing from the same book, there were clusterings of odd physiognomies, not unlike those groups of cherubs we sometimes see on country tombstones."

One of the first necessities at a musical party is a good accompanist. It is almost a greater desideratum than a soloist, because many young men and girls can sing whilst they cannot play their own accompaniments. Some people who are not very good virtuosos can read an accompaniment off at sight, and play it very decently. When found you should endeavour to "make a note of them," so as to be able to gain their assistance when

wanted. Another "dodge" is to have a small (or even a large) selection of simple tuneful part songs (those of a somewhat well known character being best for the purpose) so that any one who has any knowledge of part singing (and almost everybody has some, however little), may be able to help. By this means one half the guests will amuse the other half, and that in a most sensible and agreeable manner. Generally speaking no one possesses a selection of part-songs, and so is destitute of this means of enjoyment ; but the hostess who is prudent will take care to provide her house with a good assortment, especially as these can be purchased for a trifling sum. If the host or hostess be musical they might learn up the accompaniment (a great assistance to a "scratch" choir), and thus ensure the success of the thing. But in any case have them ready to hand, and then they can be introduced to vary the solos, etc., and will be duly appreciated by every one.

A word for the piano. Some people take little or no care of their piano ; and do not even always have it kept in tune. Now, to a musical ear nothing is so painful as anything out of tune, whether it be vocal or instrumental ; and to have to listen during a whole evening to a piano which does not accord is most distressing, and quite destructive of all enjoyment of the music.

Many people have the instruments in an inaccessible, or at least an unfrequented room ; thus in houses containing several floors it is quite common to find the piano far away from the living room ; quietly ensconced in a cold drawing room, perhaps. In consequence of this arrangement it is quite a business to get to the piano, and in the winter, when the room is like an ice well, no one can stay in it, except a fire be lit, and as this involves a lot of trouble, very little practising is done ; and as a natural result very little proficiency is attained. Pianos now are so low priced that it is almost desirable to have a second one to be kept in the living room, so that an hour's music may be had, at any time, without the fuss of a "crusade" upstairs ; but in any case it is better to have the instrument on the living floor. And here, I hope, my dear Reader, you will forgive me, if I say that some people (not *you*, of course, but some *other* people) have *a most unfortunate* knack of allowing their pieces of *music to get into a heap*. There is no order nor arrange-

ment, no separation nor classification, and hence it not unfrequently happens that when some friend asks for a favourite song it has to be searched for high and low, and is finally discovered at the very bottom of a large pile of music—possibly under the sofa, or stowed away in the cupboard. I know, of course, that where there are several performers who practice, strict order and arrangement are not very easy, but is it not better to have the various pieces divided into groups?—say, let the songs be in one parcel, and the instrumental solos in another, etc., etc.; and then when a particular piece is desired, anyone can lay his hand upon it directly. A very good arrangement which some people adopt is to have a large ottoman constructed with a stuffed top, so as to form a music seat; whilst inside it is divided into compartments, which serve to hold the pieces in little groups ready for selection at a moment's notice. The music is kept much cleaner in this receptacle than in the ordinary Canterbury.

Another habit, into which some people fall, is that of always keeping sheet music and music books as well on the top of the piano. If moved off it is speedily replaced just as before. Now this is a great mistake, for music requires all the vibration it can get, and anything placed upon the instrument deadens and stifles the sound. And if, when a solo is being played, it is desired to raise the lid, every bit of the music has to be removed before the desideratum can be accomplished. Surely room can be found elsewhere. Those pieces which are in use can be placed in the ottoman or cupboard, and those which are not required can be packed away. The instrument should never have anything upon it (not even a particle of dust or dirt) when it is being played upon. Some people too do not keep the keys clean and white; and yet how slovenly it looks to see a row of ivory keys with all the finger marks of countless sonatas and symphonies upon them! Surely a few minutes can well be spared with a damp cloth and bit of wash leather to make everything look clean and smart, and will be amply repaid by the feeling of being able to show your friends a well kept instrument.



XIII.

SOCIAL GAMES.

"So little did he understand
The desperate feats he took in hand.
For when he'd got himself a name
For fraud and tricks, he spoiled his game."

Butler.

ANY games depend upon, or rather require, elaborate or costly apparatus; and to play them with any amount of success, the labour or experience of years. Games of pure skill, too, where two persons only are engaged not unfrequently, if one or other happens to have a quick temper, lead to unpleasant consequences. At any rate they do not always improve the cordiality of friends. And besides for amusing a large number something simple and slight would seem to be more appropriate. There is a capital game played in some houses, which seems to fulfil these requirements. It involves no apparatus whatever, can be learned in a minute, is so simple that a child can understand it, and can be made so amusing that none can fail in becoming interested. It also has the happy knack of instructing and rubbing up one's knowledge tremendously. Some of the questions asked are very puzzling indeed to answer, and one needs to be careful, since after each game is over the chief actor in the scene has to endure a good natured patter of questions of "how could so-and-so be a part of something else," and "if it was such and such a thing how could it be alive?" The game is called "CLUBS," and any number of visitors can take part in it. In fact the larger the number the more amusing it is likely to prove. It is played as follows:—The guests are divided into two parties of equal number, and are forthwith considered as *rivals*; then one person is deputed to go from each "camp" to some place out of hearing of the general

body of players, (it is more agreeable to those who form the two deputies if a lady and gentleman be chosen alternately from each camp), and do there select something to form the subject of debate. This done, they return to the camps, going, however, each to the opposite one from which he or she came out, and the players then have to discover by asking questions, what is the chosen word. The deputies are only to answer "No," or "Yes," and are not to explain anything until the word is guessed; when they will have to render an account for certain doubtful answers, and sundry ambiguous meanings. For although it seems very simple to have only one of two answers to make, yet in the game the deputies are often kept in roars of laughter trying to say yes or no to the question of "whether music is vegetable," or if "it (Mr. Gladstone's tongue) is mentioned in Shakespeare." It brings out all the latent talent, because the deputies have to give answers as best they can, and the players have to rack their brains to imagine from the clues afforded by the answers, what the chosen subject can be. The camp which guesses the word first keeps both the deputies, so that presently the other camp is so weakened that it has to give up the contest of wit. This game may be played the reverse way, that is, the players can select a word during the absence of the deputies, who, on their return, have to discover the word chosen, as in Proverbs. The great attraction and amusement of the game lies in the bright questions and answers which are given, and which give rise from their absurdity to roars of laughter. How could you help laughing, if you were asked whether it (the chosen word being "Cleopatra's Needle") is good to eat! or whether it ("Woman's rights") is as large as your head? In fact, it is one of the most mirth provoking games possible.

Something very akin to it is another game called LIGHTS, in which one person chooses a word for him or herself, and commences a kind of discourse, in which he shadows forth, in hazy language, the characteristics of his chosen subject. As soon as any one thinks he has guessed it he continues the discourse, when the original "lighter" soon finds out if he is on the right "tack." If the original is *bright* the game is not at all a bad one, especially for a small party.

HOW, WHEN AND WHERE is a very good game of the

same character, in which the chooser of the word has to tell how, when and where the selected thing is employed so that the querists may discover from the answers what has been chosen. This also is capable amongst sociable friends, of producing a great deal of amusement, especially if a word of several different meanings to one sound be selected.

WHAT IS MY THOUGHT LIKE? is another game somewhat similar, in which every one *suggests* that it is like something, and finds out that it is not at all like it, but has to prove in some ingenious manner that a resemblance does exist, or else pay a forfeit. Perhaps in these games the deputed one has the greatest amusement at the time, but as each goes out successively, every one at last has been deputy, and so had his turn of entertainment.

The grand secret in amusements is to keep every one engaged in the game all the time, so that all may be interested: some games fail in this way, as for instance, PROVERBS, in which the guests share a proverb between them, each taking a word, and having to shadow forth some meaning of it in answer to questions of the deputy. In this way one of the guests only is occupied at a time, and the time is so long in coming round, that the waiting ones, growing weary, begin to yawn with *ennui*. For another reason, games with forfeits are unsuitable for adults, although they do very well for children. It is inconvenient for the former to give articles as forfeits, and still more so to redeem them, so that a game to be suitable for grown up visitors should depend for success upon the mirth and wit it produces, in the playing. Adults, too (many of whom have been actively engaged all day), naturally do not care for a game which involves much running about, such as TWIRL THE TRENCHER, BLIND MAN'S BUFF, POST, MUSICAL FRIGHT, etc. Again, other games necessitate sitting, or standing in uncomfortable positions, such as HUNT THE SLIPPER, THE GRAND MUFTI, etc. Whilst some are only suitable for children, such as HONEY POTS, ORANGES AND LEMONS. Games that are adapted for adults will be entertaining in proportion as they arouse the mental faculties into action. A very good game is called *FRAMEWORK STORIES*, in which one persons makes up *a short account* of an adventurous walk, and as he is

making up its sections (without showing them yet), he says to the other players "now put down a time in the morning," and then, "now put down an article of man's attire, etc." When all things are put down he reads out the first part of his story and asks for each to state his contribution of information, thus making a most amusing story.

Another game goes by the name of the **RUSSIAN SCANDAL**. One player takes another apart, and reads a short story over to him once; the latter then takes another apart, and repeats the story; the last one repeating it aloud. The result is somewhat as follows:—

Original story: "I am credibly informed, on the authority of a lady from Ireland, that a gentleman was going inside a carriage up a hill. At the steepest place the horse stopped, and the driver came up, opened the door, and slammed it again, saying 'You see, sir, I must do this, or he'll never go up the hill, unless I come round him this way.' The horse, you see, thought the traveller was walking, and so pulled willingly."

The last repeat:—

"Ladies and gentlemen,—I am credibly informed, on the authority of a lady from Ireland, that the means by which people are taken up hills is that the driver says 'Come, sir, he won't do it, so you must;' turns the passenger out, puts the horse into the carriage, slams the door, and makes the traveller draw the horse up the hill."

This, of course, sets everybody shouting, and is really a most mirth-provoking game. The chief point is to give very short, pithy stories, containing only two or three facts in good relief.

To those who are used to sketching, a great deal of amusement is afforded by getting a number of slips of paper, and giving one to each guest, so that each may make thereon at the top a small rough sketch of a simple character. The slips of paper are then handed in succession to each one's neighbour, who writes under the sketch his idea of what is intended. He then folds it over to conceal his idea, and passes the sketch on. When all the papers are filled up, some one is deputed to read aloud the suggestions made, having first shown and explained what was the subject intended. If the players are a little ingenious, a great deal of amusement results from the process. One good feature is that the sketches need

not be "high art" productions, as the chief interest of the game centres in the answers written underneath the drawings.

Another variation of the above is called *RETCH'S OUTLINES*. Each player draws two lines, forming an angle or part of a circle, on a piece of paper, and then passes it on to his neighbour, who is to make it into a picture. There need be no attempt to make fine pictures, as the chief merit of them is the pleasure of quizzing rapid pictures, especially where a little ingenuity has been displayed in producing uncouth subjects.

Another game I have seen played is called *ACTED VERBS*: it is something after the fashion of *ACTED CHARADES*. Part of the visitors quit the room, whilst the rest fix on a verb, and select words rhyming with it, and each endeavours to act *his* word. Then, suppose the word chosen was *Ball*, one player will *bawl* out—another let things *fall*, etc., and the rest will guess. When they have guessed rightly, the others go out and act.

For those who are well up in history this is a good game. One of the players makes a list of historical characters, and allots them one to each player. Then he calls up Sir Walter Raleigh, Henry VIII., Mary Queen of Scots, etc., asks each person to give an account of himself—where he lived, what he did, what action did him most credit, etc. Amongst real friends this will produce a great deal of amusement. It is hardly a game for semi-strangers, as no one likes to have his ignorance of history exhibited in a strong light.

There are many similar games, but the chief charm in all is that the company cordially carry out the intention and enter into the spirit of them. A hostess with a little tact will soon lead off, and a very pleasant time you will have of it.





XV.

SCIENCE FOR PARTIES.

"A handful of red sand, from the hot clime
Of Arab deserts brought,
Within this glass becomes the spy of Time,
The minister of Thought."

Longfellow.

WHAT? I fancy I can hear some well-meaning, though aged, reader exclaiming, on reading the above title, "*What!* are we to have our rooms fitted up with huge glass jars, like the lecture theatre at the Polytechnic—to have enormous electric machines fizzing and spluttering about everywhere—hot and sulphurous fumes pervading the staircase and passage, to say nothing of ruined carpets, damaged furniture, and spoiled dresses?" No! no! my dear reader, nothing of the sort! It is quite possible to dabble a long way into science, and to become very proficient in the more ordinary phenomena of scientific work, without any of the disagreeable effects above described.

Possibly some will remember the story of the foreign philosopher who called upon Wollaston, asking to see the laboratory where he worked, and expecting to find a grand place fitted up with expensive and complicated apparatus; and who was shown by the Doctor a small tray, with a few pill-boxes, little phials, etc., and told that with such insignificant materials the Doctor had made such wonderful and world-renowned discoveries! Science, to be effective, need not have costly or elaborate apparatus—science, to be interesting and entertaining, need be neither profound nor exhaustive. There are many well-known objects used in daily life—many most ordinary phenomena—which will prove, when enquired into, interesting and novel subjects for illustration. I saw a lecturer once put some common white sugar into a

little water, and pour in some diluted sulphuric acid. These, when first mixed, appeared just like water. As the lecturer kept on stirring, however, the water began to thicken, and suddenly rose up into a mountain of solid black pulp. Everybody was astonished when the lecturer told them that every time they eat some sugar they are really devouring so much of this black stuff (which was simply carbon), and some interesting remarks followed about the composition of various foods, etc.

I merely mention this as a type of what may be done, but there are many experiments which may be performed in a drawing-room without the slightest danger, and without the smallest damage to its contents; and much knowledge and information may be gained about the ordinary commonplaces of life, which not one person in a dozen has ever heard of. Look, for instance, at the Polytechnic Institution. Hundreds of people are amused and delighted with what appear to be (and in fact really are) startling novelties and wonderful experiments; and yet these are but new views of objects as familiar to them as their own features. Take, for instance, one of those popular chemical chests which are sold at so low a price (some of them costing but a few shillings), and see how many curious experiments you may make with them, and what a vast fund of amusement and instruction may be gained from an attentive and suitable observation of the effects produced. Many people will go and pay a large sum to hear an elementary course of lectures on food or chemistry, when they might, by a little industry, master the rudiments of the subject, and, by the aid of a few simple and inexpensive chemicals, and some home-made articles of apparatus, be able to lecture themselves, and to amuse a room full of their friends in a most delightful and sensible manner. For example, if you buy a shilling manual of elementary chemistry and peruse it, you will at once perceive that there is not one person in twenty who could answer half the questions or give you even the feeblest account of the phenomena explained in the book, yet who would be delighted to listen to a sketch of them, accompanied by some entertaining experiments! Or, if your taste be for electricity, you can, by a little ingenuity, construct a lot of apparatus, essential parts of which may be purchased at certain well-known establishments, which make a practice of supplying amateur wants at moderate prices.

You may have telephones, microphones, small electric lights, give shocks, show the composition of water, have a small telegraph—in fact, perform hundreds of most amusing experiments, and that without spending nearly so much money as would be required to take you to the theatre. Then there is Botany, if your taste runs that way. I have seen most beautiful collections of wild and hardy plants and ferns arranged in order, classified in groups, and all exhibiting the gradation and peculiarities observable in Nature. And very curious indeed are the structures of many of our native flora, and the means provided to meet their wants and continue their varied functions. And how delightful it is in the summer time, if one has a taste for wild flowers, to go out into the country, and search for specimen types of the various orders; and how much interest afterwards is excited in arranging them in groups and exhibiting their affinity, resemblances, and differences.

A microscope, even of the simplest and cheapest construction, will furnish a large field of entertainment if the objects are made interesting by being pointed out and explained. The exhibitor will have much to tell of the incidents of collecting the materials—the difficulties of preserving them—the dangers incurred and the risks run. How entertaining it always is to see a familiar lump of sugar magnified into a kind of rugged Mont Blanc; or a leaf-stalk into a great log of timber! In many shop-bought objects the *actual material* of which they are composed is cheap and easily procured, and the money you pay is to cover the *labour* of preparing them. By the exercise of a little patience and ingenuity, almost any one can soon acquire the knack of preparing these objects for his microscope; and the process of production (unlike most preparatory processes) is interesting in itself, and amply repays the small trouble expended.

Then there are many popular and scientific toys sold in the shops which may be purchased for a few pence, and which may be made the text for a good deal of curious experiment and discussion.

The question of Art for parties at first seems to be a formidable one. The first impression of the word is that of a fine exhibition of paintings, sculpture, carved wood-work, china, or something eminently beautiful to look at, and any one may very justly feel rather staggered at being

told that they ought to encourage art at their reunions. But this ghost, like every other, is very unsubstantial when examined closely, and soon disappears altogether as you approach nearer. It is not at all necessary to possess a Grosvenor Gallery or a Christy-and-Manson's showroom in order to cultivate the love of art. Many books have lately been written to show how easily and cheaply any one, by means of a little care and art education, may surround themselves with beautiful art objects—artistic furniture, china, upholstery, ornaments, etc. The question of pictures, sculpture, etc., is one entirely of means; but even here there are many little gems of art which may still be picked up by a *connoisseur*. But the great point is to acquire information about art, so as to be an authority upon the point—so as to be able to shed around the simplest objects a halo of interest and information. If you listen for a moment to the conversation of a Ruskin when dilating upon critical art, do you not feel entertained? Does not your curiosity become excited? Do you not go away with a feeling that you would like to hear more about the old china or quaint prints—more about the mode of life of those old world workers who fashioned all these dainty things? And can you not imagine that your friends would feel the same curiosity and desires if you could only talk to them in the same way and of similar objects? Do you not think how you might hold them spell-bound while you related to them an anecdote of the distress of Palissy, the potter, or of Quintin Matsys' love episode? But in order to do this you will undoubtedly have to "cram"—that is, you must acquire the knowledge before you can hope to place it in an agreeable form before your friends. We have so many opportunities for educating our art tastes: we have splendid national museums, wherein everything is described fully and chronologically, and grouped in order. We can purchase cheap manuals on almost any subject which we desire to investigate. Our shops furnish us with thousands of objects to contemplate or invest in; and any one who has the desire to cultivate any particular branch of art can find ample means of doing so at a minimum of expense.

If your taste runs rather to literature, see what great opportunities there are of cultivating it. In the British Museum we have the finest and most complete modern library in the world. It is splendidly arranged for pro-

viding readers with every means and convenience for the pursuit of literary knowledge ; and although, unfortunately, it is only fully available during the daylight and partially with the electric light, yet means can generally be found somehow by the busiest for snatching an hour or two during the day. Then there are the South Kensington and Bethnal Green Museums open nearly always ; there are local museums in provincial towns ; there are libraries almost everywhere ; book-stalls, where old standard books may often be purchased at a low price ; there are periodicals devoted to literary reviews and information ; and every newspaper conveys some information about literary matters. What a contrast are our opportunities to those of a person whom Sir Walter Scott was fond of mentioning—John Leyden, who, when a poor, bare-footed boy, was accustomed to walk six or eight miles across the moors daily to learn reading at the little village school-house of Kirkton, and that this was all the education he received—the rest he acquired himself ; yet before he was nineteen he astonished all the professors in Edinburgh by his profound knowledge of Greek and Latin !





XV.

LECTURES AND DISCUSSIONS.

"There was an ancient sage philosopher,
That had read Alexander Ross over ;
And swore the world, 'as he could prove,
Was made of fighting and of love."

Butler.

THE popular idea of a lecture consists in going on a set night to a large room filled with chairs ; its walls hung with strange and odd diagrams, done to a very large scale, a small table on a platform having on its clean green baize cloth a small reading desk, a bottle of water and a tumbler, a long thin white wand, and perchance a black board and chalk. Add to this a slim gentleman neatly attired in faultless evening dress, and you have the usual phenomena of a lecture. Whether these things are necessary to form a *proper* lecture I am not going to decide, but the kind of lecture I am going to speak of is quite a different thing to that above described. It is a *social* lecture as distinguished from a *public* lecture. The idea is due to a friend of mine who some years ago bore an energetic part in a scheme of this kind. A number of young men, observing how much information they had gathered at school from attending the lectures of the various professors, were led to the conclusion that they might continue to increase their stock of knowledge by continuing the same means for its communication ; and they resolved to carry out the idea on "co-operative" principles. They agreed that each should take up the subject with which he was most familiar and to which he was most attached, and make himself master of it. Then they arranged a course of lectures on the various subjects to be given at their respective homes on suitable *evenings* ; each member of the confraternity received *tickets for two friends* (the host being, of course, at liberty

to invite whom he chose). Each lecturer constructed his own diagrams, and provided all necessary apparatus (which was of a simple and inexpensive character). The lectures were a great success. The apparatus was of a homely kind—the audience expected knowledge, not costly apparatus—and was mostly, if not entirely, home manufactured. The refreshments were limited to tea, coffee, bread and butter, etc., and the hours were fixed conveniently to suit early people. Of course each lecturer had to devote many hours to prepare materials for his lecture (short as the lecture itself was), but the hours spent were hours gained, for the process of mastering his subject so impressed it on his memory that it never entirely faded away, and could always be recalled with more or less distinctness; and could soon have been worked up again to the lecture point. Then again, as there were several people in the confraternity, the task came but seldom to any one member of it, and so gave him plenty of time for preparation.

These lectures were continued for some time, until the various members separated to take their allotted paths in life. But the lesson was never forgotten, and to this day they remember with delight the many pleasant evenings spent in sensible and praiseworthy recreation; and date back much of their knowledge to these interesting occasions.

Almost everyone must feel how limited their information is; for instance, in taking up a newspaper and seeing the account of some occurrence which took place in a foreign country, they instantly say to themselves "where is such and such a place? dear me, how ignorant I am of geography!" Or if some historical personage is mentioned, do they not mentally observe "Why when I was at school I could have told all about that individual, and now I have forgotten, I must 'rub up' my history I can see, or I shall be quite left behind."

The new public lectures which are now being delivered, will eventually cause a great flow of enlightening knowledge amongst the younger members of society, but what we seem to need is self-improvement—that healthy emulation which grows with what it feeds on—which is its own stimulant, and which will confer a deep and lasting benefit upon every one who comes within the scope of its influence.



XVI.

READING PARTIES.

"O precious evenings! all too swiftly sped!
Leaving us heirs to amplest heritages
Of all the best thoughts of the greatest sages,
And giving tongues unto the silent dead!"

Longfellow.

P to a few years ago it was supposed that people would not care to come and pay money to hear amateurs read, but the long and successful courses of Penny Readings have completely dispelled that notion. It is no uncommon thing in fact to see a large room filled night after night, and indeed persons turned away unable to obtain admission. And it is a curious fact that when a concert composed wholly of music, sung by amateurs, will scarcely half fill the room, a Penny Reading, composed of short pieces of reading interspersed with music will have a complete success. It appears to point the moral that everybody does not care for music. And the same truth will hold good in private assemblies too, for it is impossible to notice the faces and expressions of one's guests while the songs are being sung and pieces played, without being unmistakably convinced of the force of this remark. Many people infinitely prefer an amusing story to the best song that ever was sung. And then again it opens a new field, for many people can read a short story very fairly, while they haven't a particle of voice or aptitude for playing an instrument of music. It will not do, however, to abolish music in private houses with amateur readers, as the entertainment will then grow monotonous and wearying; it is desirable to blend the two by alternating them. One great point is to make all the necessary arrangements beforehand. Impromptu *things* are sometimes very charming in the hands of *skilful people*, but in the ordinary way (and indeed very

frequently) they turn out unfortunately. The principal person does not appear, or when he comes he has not brought his materials with him, he "hadn't any idea you would like him to read or he would have been most happy etc., should he go home and fetch the books?" And another point to be attended to is to have some information as to the pieces proposed to be read. Of course it is a delicate matter to control the selection of readings by amateur readers who, to a man, consider themselves competent judges of their own pieces; but it not unfrequently happens that the readings selected are very unsuitable, either from being too long, too classical, or too childish. It is also desirable, if possible, to make the affair a co-operative one, and to appoint a small committee of management whose duty it will be to arrange a programme from materials furnished by the readers. In this way each evening will be mapped out and properly filled with the most convenient number and duration of readings, according to the views of the committee. My reason for suggesting a committee is, that I have seen so many good movements break down through the isolation of its leaders, who, with the best intention, really work in opposite directions, and the scheme, thus mismanaged, soon comes to grief. With regard to the selection of pieces, I would suggest that there should be chiefly short narratives, either in prose or verse (the former by preference), and of which so large a selection is afforded in the numerous periodicals of the day. Selections can be made from good novels, histories, travels, biographies, etc., provided the portion selected comes to a successful climax, and is not more than, say, twenty minutes long at the outside; a quarter of an hour is better except in unusually good hands. This arrangement, if the entertainment lasts two hours, will give occasion for about six readings, which are quite sufficient for one evening; the rest of the time being occupied by music.

One of the great merits of this kind of entertainment is that it virtually makes the visitors amuse themselves, for as everyone knows that their turn will come presently, they feel a livelier interest in each of the other performers, and are disposed to be more attentive in proportion as they desire attention to their own performance afterwards.

The question of refreshments is an optional one, but if

you invite people to your house for an evening you are expected to provide them with some kind of sustenance. Perhaps the best way is to commence with a thick tea, and then at the conclusion have wine and biscuits and cake just to cheer up the guests before departing. Another hint is not to have these entertainments occurring too often, that is to say when they are periodic, or else they will be found to tax the energies of the association, and weaken the charm of the entertainment. About one every fortnight will generally be found frequent enough to secure a good attendance. This kind of gatherings is peculiarly suited to persons living in the country, who do not possess the many places of amusements provided for townspeople and where the evenings always *seem* to be longer, and they will be found most agreeable because they will bind people together and make them more social. Nothing tends so much to improve the social and moral tone of people as meeting together in some sensible kind of amusement ; it expands their hearts, raises their spirits, and makes them better people altogether.





XVII.

DANCES, "CINDERELLA," FULL SIZE.

"There was a sound of revelry by night,
And Belgium's capital had gathered then
Her beauty and her chivalry, and bright
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men
A thousand hearts beat happily."

Byron.



It has always been a moot point whether a dinner or a ball is the more attractive. They differ in one great respect, viz., that at a public dinner ladies are not permitted, whereas at a public ball they are the centres of attraction. Now as no entertainment can be said to be perfect without the presence of the dear creatures, it seems to be a very "fair" argument in favour of the latter (the ball). Chaucer gives us a charming picture of an English girl dancing.

"I saw her dance so comelily,
Carol and sing so sweetly,
And laugh, and play, so womanly,
And lookē so debónairly,
So goodly speak and so friendléy,
That, certes, I trow that nevermore
Was seen so blissful a treasure."

And Sir John Suckling in his exquisite ballad on a wedding says of the bride :—

"Her feet beneath her petticoat,
Like little mice stole in and out,
As if they fear'd the light ;
But oh ! she dances such a way !
No sun upon an Easter day
Is half so fine a sight." *

*In ancient time the sun was credited with dancing on Easter day.

I suppose if the nation were canvassed the greater part of it would vote for the dancing too. There is a charm and attraction about a good dance which is indescribable, and unique. It is of course more adapted for the younger people, being an exercise which requires a considerable expenditure of bodily vigour ; but occasionally, those who are no longer young take a very great interest in its movements, and it is no uncommon thing to see a grandfather (if not a grandmother) standing up to a quadrille.

Washington Irving says in his Sketch Book :—

“The dance, like most dances after supper, was a merry one ; some of the old folks joined in it, and the squire himself figured down several couple, with a partner, with whom he affirmed he had danced at every Christmas for nearly half a century.”

And almost every young person can join in it : its various steps and figures can be easily acquired at home from sisters or brothers, and it is a most agreeable mode of introducing people together. At the same time it has many sins to answer for.

There is the sin of late hours. And this is an evil which keeps on increasing, the balls seeming to get later and later. It is not so long since a ball commenced in Paris at midnight ? How we have degenerated from the days of which Milton speaks so beautifully—

“Sometimes with secure delight
The upland hamlets will invite,
When the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound
To many a youth and many a maid,
Dancing in the chequered shade ;
And old and young come forth to play
On a sunshine holiday,
Till the livelong daylight fail.

Even in England we adopt much later times for dancing than for any other kind of entertainment. No one would think of beginning dinner at nine or half-past nine o'clock at night, and yet balls are quite commonly set down for that hour. The consequence is that, in order to give a full opportunity of enjoyment the dance has to be prolonged to the small hours of the morning, *until very often* “daylight doth appear” to the votaries of *Terpsichore*. The excuse usually made is that one

cannot secure the attendance of the men, without whom, of course there can be no dancing; and the curious part of it is that men will get home early, dress, and go to the theatre or to dinner, but directly a dance is talked about, they say "Oh! I shan't go till about ten o'clock, there won't be many there till then." This state of things is then the result of custom, which if it could be broken through would return to its proper bearings. If the hostess made a point of desiring the guests to be punctual, stating that she hoped that dancing would commence at a particular time, I think that gallantry would force the men to take the hint. If people come at ten and leave at three, why could they not come at eight and leave at one?

If a few of the more sensible ladies, who are in the habit of giving dances, were to make up their minds that their entertainments should take place within reasonable limits, the thing would be done. There is an old maxim that "those who pay the piper should order the tune," surely then, if a lady were to lay down on her cards of invitation her views of the duration of the ball, every one would be obliged to conform to them, and when they came to think of it afterwards they would feel inwardly grateful to her for being firm and sensible.

There is one kind of dance which is less open to these criticisms—the so-called "Cinderella" dance which usually begins about seven or eight, and ends at twelve o'clock. And although some of the *jeunesse d'oré* do turn up their noses at these entertainments as modern innovations, they are far more sensible and better adapted to the exigencies of life than the long hours of the old-fashioned dance.

There is also another kind of dance, which some term a carpet dance, and which is of a still simpler and more sociable character. The attire is half-dress, that is gentlemen wear black dress clothes and dark gloves, and the ladies appear in walking or square cut dresses. The refreshments are usually confined to sandwiches, sausage-rolls, etc., pastry, fruits, port, sherry, hock and claret (no champagne), lemonade cups, etc. The carpets are not taken up, but a crumb or rather dancing cloth is fastened down upon them, which can be easily removed next day. The great charm of these entertainments is their simplicity and cheapness. They afford quite as much opportunity

for friends to meet together as the larger, more elaborate affairs, and two or three of them can be given at the cost of one of the old sort.

One word as to dance music. In some families there exists a desire to adopt the Duke of Wellington's famous dictum, "if you want a thing well done do it yourself," so they rely upon their own and friends' efforts to provide the requisite harmony, and in some instances this arrangement may answer.

I remember, however, being at a party of this description when a well-intentioned friend set to work. Yes, and hard work too, but not such hard work as the dancers had to perform to accommodate their movements to those of the music. For owing to the varying "temps" of the pieces, sometimes we were walking in solemn procession, and anon flying round at a hand gallop running a kind of small race to be "in at the death" with the music. The player, from being unused to play to dancers, had not learned to subordinate everything to strict time, and the result was an utter failure.

It requires a good "timeist" to play well for dancing, and even those who can play would naturally prefer to dance. Under these circumstances I should strongly advise every one who contemplates giving a dance to have a professional player; the cost is not very great, and the convenience immense. It leaves everyone free to dance, and taxes nobody's good nature to play.

There is a very amusing description of a "Grand Hunt Ball," in Mr. Murphy's capital book,* which gives a vivid picture of how they dance in the backwoods.

"A large wooden barn, which was used as a store room for wheat and other grain, was emptied of its bins, and turned into a sightly and capacious ball room . . . it was attended by the beauty and chivalry of Blank Prairie.

"The former were perfect specimens of rustic life, and the latter were typical representatives of the ideal pioneers who cared little for "biled" shirts, and tripped it away gaily without coat or waistcoat, whilst some of them had their trowsers tucked inside their heavy cow-hide boots. . . . The band consisted of one fiddler, who was perched on a chair that rested on two planks surmounting

* "*Sporting Adventures in the Far West.*"—J. M. MURPHY.

some barrels. . . . When the company were assembled, the band scratched his fiddle violently a few times, causing it to give several excruciating screams, and after producing several cat-like flourishes, he ordered all who wished to dance to form on the floor for a 'country' dance.

"When the lines were in position, he shouted out something like the following, "Now, any of you who don't know how to dance 'Money Musk,' had better get off the floor and sit on the planks, because I don't want you to spile the fun of all the rest.

"As nobody seemed inclined to move, he turned to a young man near him, and said—

"'Jem Coffee-pot, do you know how to dance this?"

"Jem replied that he did.

"'I don't b'leeve that,' said the band, 'cause I've seen you try it on before, and you couldn't dance a cent. But never mind, drive ahead now, as I see Susan Bumpas is your partner.'

"'All ready?"

"'Yes,' shouted several voices; and with this he commenced scratching away for dear life, while the Terpsichoreans went rushing up and down the floor, and bumping against each other so vigorously that the weaker were frequently sent reeling to the wall.

"Everything was done in the greatest hurry—hence what the dance lacked in grace was atoned for in strength and boisterous laughing confusion. Half of those on the floor did not know the first principles of the figure, so they went rushing wildly about, while a dozen others were calling off the movements.

"This seemed to make the self-sufficient band angry, for he yelled out authoritatively—

"'Stop! stop! Not one of you knows any more about dancing than a coyote! Now do as I tell you; and those who don't like to do it can find a seat on the boards, where they belong.

"'Jem Coffee-pot, no foolin'; and you, Hezekiah Sheepshank, needn't spile the set by knowin' more'n you do. You weren't made for a dancing master. I could get a herrin' knows more about it 'n you do.

"'You ladies needn't keep swingin' so long; a ballroom ain't no place for showin' your feelins.

"'Now, all ready?"

“‘Yes,’ shouted several.

“‘Fire away, then,’ was the answer.

“‘Now Tom Fryin’-pan, take Susan Fish by the hand and bow to her politely. Bow all. Up and down the centre, Tom, and swing. Lead off and make it lively. Scoot to the ‘ind agen and back here. Come, make it lively; none o’ your waltzin’ airs here. Swing opposite couples until you get to the ‘ind. Make it lively; one might think you were goin’ to a funeral. Now balance all, and swing partners. That’s the way to do it. Tildy Fat, take Dandy Jim through the same manœuvres the others did.

“‘Hefty, isn’t she, Dandy? Your biled shirt ’ll be wet if you swing her much.

“‘Now swing opposite sides.

“‘You’ll knock the dust out of the floor, Tildy, if you peg it away like that. It’ll do you good, though. All balance and swing partners.

“‘That’s life for you—that’s dancing! Even the barrels under me are dancin’ so lively that I’ll soon be off. Nothin’ like good music. All promenade. Jerusalem! what a dust! I’m nearly choked. Fire away, though; never mind me if any of you have anything like ‘stone fence’ about you.’

“‘With such comments as these, many of which were so ludicrous that the Terpsichoreans were roaring with laughter, he sent all through the figure, and when it was over they were panting loudly, while their faces were streaming and covered with perspiration. . . . These exhibitions of strength were kept up almost uninterruptedly until morning, the only interval of any consequence being that devoted to refreshments at midnight. . . . When the dancing party dispersed in the morning, few there were who did not look thoroughly fagged out, yet all were delighted with the night of pleasure.”

In giving a ball *never invite those to dance who are unable or unaccustomed to do so.* Sometimes, from pure good-nature, and with the best intention, a hostess sends an invitation to a person recently bereaved, to aged people, to the physically afflicted, etc. Now this, although done from an amiable motive, is a great mistake for two reasons—firstly, because to sit for an entire evening *looking on* at other people enjoying themselves in a *diversion* they are debarred from must be very saddening;

and secondly, because their presence, under such circumstances, makes the dancers feel uncomfortable. It would be far better to invite all these friends on another occasion, when suitable entertainment of a different kind could be provided, and in which they could join, and be all equally delighted. Make each entertainment "all of a kind," and invite to it only those who can join in it naturally and with satisfaction.

Speaking of dances reminds me that now-a-days young men do not always behave with the gallantry befitting the occasion. Whether it is that they become so fascinated by one person as to be blind to all the rest I do not know, but not unfrequently at private dances one sees certain young ladies dancing every time, and others not even asked to dance. And if rallied upon the point, the ready excuse is, "O ! my doctor has ordered me to avoid *round dances as much as possible*," or if asked for a square they reply "Thanks, but all my squares are filled up." These gentlemen (!) seem to forget that the hostess, in inviting one, has invited all, and that she reasonably expects that all will make themselves mutually agreeable—that they will sink a little of their exclusive self-gratification, and endeavour to promote the pleasure of the other guests as well. Ladies who dance naturally go to a ball in full expectation of finding partners there who will guide them through "its giddy mazes," and that they will (occasionally at least) be asked to dance ; the privilege of making the first advance resting on these occasions with the gentlemen, for them not to do, and to hold aloof altogether, is as unkind as it is wanting in politeness.

Young ladies, particularly those who are more highly favoured, are not altogether blameless in this respect ; and often a young gentleman is shown a filled up card wherein all the names are fictitious (the real card being snugly hid away), simply because they have taken exception to his figure or his personal appearance. Another little objectionable practice is for a fair maiden to engage to dance with some one, and, when the number is reached, the gentleman looks in vain for his partner—she in the meantime being comfortably seated in some sheltered nook, utterly oblivious of her engagement. This is not fair play. When a lady cannot perform (or wishes to be relieved from) an engagement to dance, she

might at least ask the gentleman's permission, and not keep him fixed to the engagement until he is unable to find another partner.

With regard to supper, tastes differ ; some hostesses crowd the tables with dainties, and the choicest wines ; others are content with modest sandwiches and port and sherry, etc. This must be left to discretion, bearing in mind, however, that the guests (at least, the only guests who ought to accept an invitation to a dance) come for dancing, and not for curious feeding.

Then again, as to the mode of supping. Some seat all the ladies at a certain hour, and get the gentlemen to wait upon them, and take their supper afterwards. This affords opportunity for little attentions which are willingly given, and gracefully received. There is one drawback, however. Whilst the gentlemen are refreshing themselves afterwards, the ladies are usually at a loss for something to do.

A much better plan, and one frequently adopted at public balls where large numbers have to be feasted, is to prepare the supper at a certain hour, and then for the hostess to invite about as many down to supper as her table will hold, and as they return to the dance to invite others until all the guests have supped. By this means there are no awkward breaks, and a few extra dances will make up for broken engagements.

I will close this chapter on dancing with a quotation in which Lord Byron describes waltzing.

“Imperial Waltz ! imported from the Rhine
(Famed for the growth of pedigrees and wine),
Long be thy import from all duty free,
And hock itself be less esteem'd than thee :
In some few qualities alike—for hock
Improves our cellar—*thou* our living stock.
The head to hock belongs—thy subtler art
Intoxicates alone the heedless heart :
Through the full veins thy gentler poison swims,
And wakes to wantonness the willing limbs.

Observant travellers of every time !
Ye quartos published upon every clime !
*Oh ! say, shall dull Romaika's heavy round,
Fandango's wriggle, or Bolero's bound ;*

Can Egypt's Almas—tantalising group—
Columbia's caperers to the warlike whoop—
Can aught from cold Kamschatka to Cape Horn
With Waltz compare, or after Waltz be borne?
Ah, no ! from Morier's pages down to Galt's,
Each tourist pens a paragraph for 'Waltz.' "





XVIII.

PRIVATE THEATRICALS: CHARADES : SHADOW PANTOMIMES: TABLEUX VIVANTS

Evening is come, and from the dark Park, hark,
The signal of the setting sun—one gun !
And six is sounding from the chime, prime time
To go and see the Drury Lane Dane slain.

T. Hood.

IT is curious to notice how most people are fond of some kind of "acting." Children begin it by "keeping shop." Young men and maidens keep it up in private theatricals, and as they grow up carry it to perfection in the Counting House, or on the Exchange. And there is really a great charm in good dramatic representation. It was commenced by the monks in their miracle plays, mysteries, morals, etc., and has reached its highest development in opera, tragedy, comedy, etc. But on a smaller and more homely field of operations, a great amount of amusement may be obtained from what are named Private Theatricals. These are a source of mutual attraction; they interest the performers as much as (sometimes, unfortunately, more than) the audience. The rehearsals are all amusing from the first, and, if a little talent and ingenuity be at the disposal of the manager, the expense will be very slight. Private theatricals, of course, require certain elements to insure success;—a long room, or, better still, two rooms with folding doors, such as exist in many houses; some little ingenuity to manufacture costumes (though they may be very simple); and some one with a knowledge of pictorial effects, to prepare a little scenery, is desirable, although not absolutely necessary, as there are many pieces treating *of actions and dialogues* which occur in dwelling-rooms. *These, it will be seen,* are very simple, and things easily

attained in almost every family ; and where a disposition to engage in this sort of entertainment exists, means are soon discovered for indulging it.

Some little discrimination in the distribution of the *parts* will be necessary. It is not enough that one may say

“ I want to go upon the stage
And wear a wig and feathers ;
I envy each tragedian
The laurels that he gathers.
I’m sure that I could give effect
To Richárd’s youthful menace ;
Oh, would that I might black my face
And act the Moor of Venice.”

You must settle by observation which parts are suited to the manner, appearance, and character of your would-be performers, and when you have settled these, you must select from the lists of the shops where they sell plays for acting, such as may best meet your supply of performers, dresses, room, etc., etc., taking care to select those not requiring too much dramatic talent. . The mistake some people make is to endeavour to perform a historical play, or a royal pageant, or a melodrama, all of which, to make them effective require great resources and very good acting. But amateurs will be much more at home in light sketchy pieces—musical burlesques, operettas, etc., and they will be more likely to please their audience and win their *honest* plaudits. The duties of the stage manager are most arduous, for he must *insist* upon implicit obedience and strict punctuality, and on him depends in a great measure the finish of the play. It is best to appoint a person for each duty, and a general manager (and fault finder) to watch over all. Some kind of curtain is indispensable, though it may be made to draw aside like window curtains or roll up like the “real thing.” Folding doors are objectionable as they prevent chairs being placed near the stage, and room is often valuable for the orchestra, etc. Footlights of gas or oil and even side lights, if possible, are very desirable. If scenery be desired you proceed as follows :—Make light frames of ordinary wood to the size you need, cover them with canvas or calico, and give them a coat of size and whitening (common ceiling distemper), then paint on (in distemper mixed with colours) what you desire to represent. It is

better, if possible to paint them by gas or lamp light, as you can then see as you go along how much yellow to put in ; and it will astonish those who have never painted scenery for night use how much yellow *is* required. For instance the sky is painted green yet looks blue, and things to look a decent white by gas must be painted primrose or even lemon-coloured by daylight ! Of course a little knowledge of perspective is necessary—the shadows are usually (unless a window is shown) *thrown from the centre*. Light green calico hung from the top, makes the sky, where an open air scene is represented. Thunder is represented by shaking a large plain plate of iron or tin, or by having a box with large marble or iron balls to roll in it. Lightning is made by blowing powdered resin or lycopodium through a small tube into a candle flame : rain by small shot in a shallow box or tin pan. Coloured lights are dangerous and better avoided. If expense is no object the dresses can of course be hired, but if there are any sisters or *cousins* these can soon be made out of simple materials at home. It is very necessary to have a good prompter, for on him depends the task of saving the piece from many a breakdown. He should attend *every* rehearsal, find out the weak points and mark them in his “prompt” copy, so as to be alive to them ; and follow the dialogue and be ready *instantly* in a stage whisper to catch up the player when tripping. Amateurs generally do not rehearse enough together. They may perhaps know their parts, but from want of sufficient rehearsals they are usually unprepared with the appropriate “*business*.”

Another fault most amateurs commit is having long intervals between the scenes, which arise chiefly in this way. Having finished the first scene they meet and discuss all that has happened : this leads to a regular gossip, and when the prompter's bell rings they suddenly discover that they haven't changed their dresses, and when this is hurriedly done (taking twice as long through broken buttons and hurry), they find out that the scenery is not shifted nor the new “properties” at hand, and it is no uncommon thing for the audience to be kept waiting 20 minutes or half an hour. *This is a great mistake, as the audience lose their amiability, and their patience too, and are less likely to applaud or be entertained afterwards.* The stage manager

must be most *severe* on this, and rule with a "rod of iron." It is most important to have at least one full dress rehearsal (it is better to have more if possible). No one who has not acted before will believe what an effect is produced on the minds and acting of the performers when fully dressed—they seem to acquire new power along with the new dress.

To recapitulate : the chief faults of amateurs are insufficient rehearsals, gossiping and not "sticking to work," bad prompting, and weakness of the stage manager. It would be well if the latter gentleman did not act, as he will then be always behind the scenes looking ahead and keeping everybody ready for action. No one ought to say a word behind the scenes *during* the act.

When there is an interregnum, such as before and between the acts, always fill it up by a little music—ever so simple music will do—so that there is just something to keep up the continuity of action. I say this because I have been at theatricals where all the guests were seated solemnly regarding a green curtain for half-an-hour with jaded faces and depressed spirits, when a little music would have brightened everybody up and disposed them to applaud vigorously when the curtain did rise. It is a good plan to let the guests, on their arrival, proceed upstairs ; and then begin the theatricals at once, handing tea, coffee, etc., round after the first act ; this will help to amuse them while the actors are preparing for the second act.

It is also a good plan to have more than one representation, for it seems a pity, when a piece is nicely got up, that it should only be played for one evening. When strangers perform there might be two representations, for which each player should receive two cards of invitation to give to his or her friends.

Charades are short pieces, wherein some sentence or motto is represented by appropriate actions, and then the audience are asked to guess the chosen sentence from what they have just seen. It is not necessary (nor indeed usual) to employ any scenery ; and for properties such things as brooms (clean ones) for spears, fire-guards for shields, etc., do valiant duty. In the hands of spirited performers great fun may be got out of these simple materials. The chief secret is that everything must be done smartly and briskly, never minding small details ;

and that the performers must select some motto which admits of a good deal of action in it.

Shadow Pantomimes are very amusing, particularly if the audience comprise several of the younger members of the family. They commonly represent some well-known story—there is the cruel father; the well-intentioned, but somewhat perverse, son; the good-natured daughter; and perhaps the over-indulgent mother. The process of performance is as follows:—A bright burning lamp is placed upon the floor facing the spectators, and a large sheet is stretched between the spectators and the lamp, on to which the players make their shadows fall. When all is ready, the first player walks over the lantern towards the sheet, and to the spectators his shadow appears to descend from the ceiling (such is the peculiar effect of the arrangement); then other players follow in the same manner, and the dramatic action begins. When a person wishes his shadow to increase in size he moves nearer the lamp, and *vice versa*; when he desires to quit the scene he runs off over the lamp, and the effect is most laughable, particularly to strangers who are not aware of the means used in producing the effects. The only apparatus required is a sheet and a good bull's eye lantern.

Another most beautiful entertainment is termed Tableaux Vivants; and consists of pictures formed by living models (some of the friends whose personal appearance possesses the necessary qualities) posed into a group, and assuming attitudes appropriate to some event in history. These tableaux vary in interest according to the materials at hand, and the skill and taste shown in arranging them. They are sometimes done in London on a grand scale. Well-known artists group them; fine men and beautiful girls are the performers; a splendid gilt frame is fixed in front, and the effect is a most *life-like* portrayal of the event. The scene is arranged, of course, *in camera* while sweet music is played, and then at a signal the attention of the audience is claimed, and the curtain rises on the scene, the time of exposure being regulated by the ability of the performers to retain their original attitudes, etc. Of course the costumes and accessories ought to be as correct as possible, and the music selected in keeping with the event depicted. *There are many well-known events in history which lend themselves readily to this kind of entertainment.*



XIX.

SLEIGHT-OF-HAND AND CONJURING

"We know too well those tricks of yours."

Butler.

NYONE with a taste this way inclined may soon acquire sufficient dexterity in performing the so-called "conjuring" tricks to be able to amuse a number of his friends. As Colonel Stodare says in his "Fly Notes :"—

"A few hours' practice will enable my young friends to execute the simple tricks that I shall first treat of ; and they will only require for their display such articles as are readily available in every household. Most of them will be supplied by any company of a few friends, and if not in the parlour can be brought from no greater distance than the kitchen or housekeeper's room—such as handkerchiefs, half-crowns, oranges, eggs, a glass bowl, &c., &c." These, with a few inexpensive articles to be supplied from repositories for the sale of conjuring apparatus, will complete the necessary outfit."

Much of the success of these things depends upon the agreeable manner of the operator. Always *appear* at least perfectly at home (having previously practised up the various feats until you are perfectly *au fait* at them) ; adopt a cheerful and pleasant manner, erring rather upon the gay than the serious side. A little music will help out the portions which require a lengthened operation. Those tricks which result in the production of nice sweetmeats, bon-bons, crackers, etc., will be much appreciated, as every one likes to have "something good," even though it be very small in amount. Do not try (at least at first) very difficult feats, or those requiring long preparation or complicated apparatus ; try rather (and it is wonderful how easily people are pleased *at home* with them) simple effects smartly produced.

Some effects require the aid of a confederate. If you need one, have one on whose fidelity you can rely. In "Houdin's Memoirs" there is narrated an example of a failure in this way which must have been most annoying: "A conjuror named Torrini, at the commencement of his career, was induced by an envious rival (Pinetti) to undertake a public exhibition of his art before a grand assembly. Torrini was at the time diffident of his own attainments, but he was persuaded to make the attempt by the assurance of Pinetti that he would take care that several confederates should be present, and should help in carrying out sundry illusions which he would have to display. In one of these the conjuror, after borrowing a ring, undertook to restore it magically into the possession of its owner. The ring was borrowed, and some mysterious gesticulations practised; but instead of the contemplated result being produced, the false confederate proclaimed aloud that he had lent a very valuable jewelled ring, and had only received back a common copper ring. The audience was, of course, disappointed at words so derogatory to the conjuror. This unpleasant feeling was deepened by the malicious meddling of another false confederate. Torrini had to present some cards to the King of Naples, who was honouring the assembly by witnessing the exhibition, and a card was selected by his Majesty. Instead, however, of being pleased with what he saw on the card, the King manifested intense disapprobation. The confederate had written on the card words of disrespect and insult, and Torrini had to retire amid the loud censures of the enraged spectators." Those who need such assistants should select sincere and reliable friends for the purpose.





XX.

CARDS.

After dinner, company divided, some to cards."

Pepys.

HERE are people whose greatest enjoyment is a good game at whist. All their stores of attention, memory and speculation—together with the just application of time-honored rules and suggestions are brought to bear upon the game. And as a *card game* it is universally admitted to be the soundest in principle and the best adapted to employ and display the talents of the players. Mr. Spectator is rather severe on card games. "I must confess I think it is below reasonable creatures to be altogether conversant in such diversions as are merely innocent, and have nothing else to recommend them, but that there is no hurt in them. Whether any kind of gaming has even thus much to say for itself, I shall not determine ; but I think it is very wonderful to see persons of the best sense passing away a dozen hours together, in shuffling and dividing a pack of cards, with no other conversation than what is made up of a few game phrases, and no other ideas but those of black or red spots ranged together in different figures. Would not a man laugh to hear any one of this species complaining that life is short !"

Unfortunately, however, the waste of time is not the only drawback. For most people who are fond of cards, play for stakes of money, and it is no uncommon thing for young men to sit down and lose in a single evening the earnings of a week.

In the presence of so many capital published manuals, giving the best directions for acquiring proficiency in the various card games, any details would here be out of place.

There is one point in which the host ought to use his discretion. Many guests have an objection to play cards, while others from their circumstances cannot afford to play for high stakes, but do not like to appear to be unsociable. On the other hand there are certain skilful and "go ahead" young gentlemen, who, proud of their skill, are disdainful of small stakes. Under these circumstances, the host or hostess will do well to limit the stakes, or provide for the playing of more than one game, so that no one afterwards may "wish he hadn't."





XXI.

OUTDOOR GAMES.

"What sort of tricks they mean to play,
By way of diversion, who can say."

Hood.



O those who have a lawn or meadow with some fair grass, few methods of amusing a lot of friends are better than a game of croquet. I am aware that to some extent the game has lost the charm which once invested it. In spite of this, it remains one of the most agreeable, sensible, and innocent of games possible. It furnishes a great deal of amusement, and is a capital excuse for a gathering of friends, and it is an entertainment in which gentlemen and ladies can equally participate. Then again the game is conducive to health, and few persons who have not considered the subject will believe how much open air exercise is taken when this game is played. Girls who profess not to be able to walk a couple of miles in the street will walk four or five round a croquet set in pursuit of the game. The same thing may be said of lawn tennis. What excellent appetites! What ruddy cheeks! What sparkling eyes! What merry laughs! And all at lawn tennis. All out of a few battledores, some white balls, and a cabbage net! Some girls complain that lawn tennis is "rather hard work," to such I would recommend Badminton, played with shuttlecocks and a different net as being less fatiguing.

These, like all open-air games, are dependent upon the proverbially fickle weather, and a rainy day upsets the most sanguine expectations. But when the sun shines brightly, and the lawn has been newly cropped—when the implements are in good order, and the competitors fairly matched—there are few games equal in attractiveness to croquet and lawn tennis.

To the more highly gifted both in muscular power and lawn space, the sport of archery offers great inducements. It is supposed to expand the chest, improve the figure, and affords fine attitudes for the painter or sculptor. But it requires a far larger space than the two games above mentioned. For even a fair arm can send a shaft a long distance, and no lady, however severe she may be on 'those dreadful men' generally, would care to send a real arrow into them. Where there is sufficient space for it, archery is a very pleasant amusement, and there are few sights more captivating than to see an accomplished toxophilite send off her "deadly shaft" into the gaily-painted and gilded target.

Cricket is a noble game, but only suitable for men. Bowls (still much played in the south-west of England), quoits, ninepins, and golf and football have the same unsociable character. Polo and tennis require special and costly appliances. Curling and skating can only be indulged in during the winter.





XXII.

INDOOR GAMES.

"Let us to billiards, Charmian."

Shakespeare.



MONGST indoor games, first in order as regards amusement afforded and skill requisite in playing it, stands the game of billiards. To play billiards *properly* requires an expensive table, and a large room, but a good deal of fun may be got out of a less costly apparatus. In fact a common dining table may be planed smooth, and converted into a billiard table by means of an apparatus costing but a few shillings. This may be improved upon by having a large well seasoned board, to which the apparatus can be fixed, and the dining table left free. The game of course depends upon the skill of the players : the worst feature is that only two or four people can play at a time, unless pool be played, when the game will accommodate almost any number of players. There is probably no game (if we except chess), which affords so much opportunity for the exercise of scientific skill as billiards. A well-played game also yields a great deal of entertainment to the spectators of it, which is more than can be said for cards. Bagatelle both in itself and in the home circle is a very good game, and the apparatus does not take up so much room as billiards, nor is the board very costly to purchase. It has also the advantage of allowing several to play at one time, by their taking different sides in the game. But a far nobler game is chess. It is said that chess resembles a military battle field, and requires a similar (though of course infinitely smaller) kind of skill. Be that as it may, chess is to those who like it most entertaining, and calls in play all their highest mental functions. It affords amusement only for two as a rule, but there is a four-players game which

is very amusing. This requires a "special" board, which can be easily made out of a newspaper, to accommodate the double set of chess men. It is formed by adding two rows (sixteen squares) on to each side of the ordinary board, and on to these the chessmen are placed. The players sit as at whist, so that the two partners face each other, and the turn of playing goes "round with the sun." The game is won by the two players of one set checkmating the two players of the other set. There are of course two sets of chessmen on the board, one half set to each player.

Some people are very fond of draughts, and are especially skilful in the mysteries of "huffing," getting kings, &c. and a new game has recently been popular under the title of "Go-Bang." There are of course numerous smaller games such as Sevastopol, French and English, many of which are very amusing to those who will take the trouble to learn how to play at them.





XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

“But if I scribble longer now,
The deuce a soul will stop to read :
My pen is blunt, my ink is low ;
’Tis almost time to stop indeed.”

Byron.

IN conclusion let me say that, if you are really fond of seeing your friends around you, you will find very little trouble in entertaining them ; for where a sociable and friendly disposition is apparent, your friends will be very easily satisfied. But it must seem to every sensible and intelligent person, that the meeting together of one’s friends ought to be the occasion of something more than the production of mere amusement—that there ought to be some diffusion of knowledge and experience, and the interchange of sensible thoughts and real information. Everyone, as he journeys through life, must necessarily (unless he goes about blind-fold) experience much that is curious, much that is entertaining, and a little which may be useful to others. Bobus Smith once made the remark that “the House of Commons was much wiser than any man in it,” meaning that its collective wisdom embraced a larger scope than its individual units ; and in the same way a party of sensible people is much more entertaining, and much richer in information than the component parts of the same separated. It rests with the host and hostess to determine what turn the conversation and amusements shall take, and if they will only be at the pains to “cram up” the topics of interest at the time, and store their minds with a few of the gems of learning, science, art, literature, etc., they will be ready to “set the ball rolling,” and initiate a most agreeable and sensible entertainment. It does not need to be always on high stilts—“tall talking” as the

Americans term it—and above all things it is necessary to avoid “boring” your visitors with abstruse details. You must, as a modern writer has observed, “fry your information into crisp and attractive little morsels,” and then everybody will readily devour them. Many people are faint-hearted, and fancy they cannot be entertaining; but let them not be discouraged; let them remember

“Life is real! Life is earnest!
 And the grave is not the goal;
 ‘Dust thou art, to dust returnest,’
 Was not spoken of the soul.
 Not *enjoyment*, and not sorrow,
 To our destined end or way;
 But to *act* that each to-morrow
 Find us farther than to-day.
 Lives of great men all remind us
 We can make our lives sublime,
 And, departing, leave behind us
 Footprints on the sands of time.”

Demosthenes had an impediment in his speech, yet, by great industry and perseverance, he became the king of orators. A great statesman of the present day was laughed down when he first addressed the Houses of Parliament, yet he has lived to be its oracle, and “the admiration of admired men.” In like manner anyone may by setting to work in the right direction soon be able to entertain his guests in a most delightful manner. There is a pretty story told of a traveller who picked up a little round stone, and noticing that it had a most agreeable odour, asked it how this happened; to which the little stone replied “it is not natural to me, but I have been lying amongst some rose leaves and have imbibed their beautiful scent.” In this way, if you have around you an atmosphere of learning, knowledge, information, etc., everyone who comes into your society will become impregnated with it, and will be able to reply to a querist “I have not much learning myself, but I have just come from an atmosphere of it, and have brought away with me some of its beautiful spoils!”





